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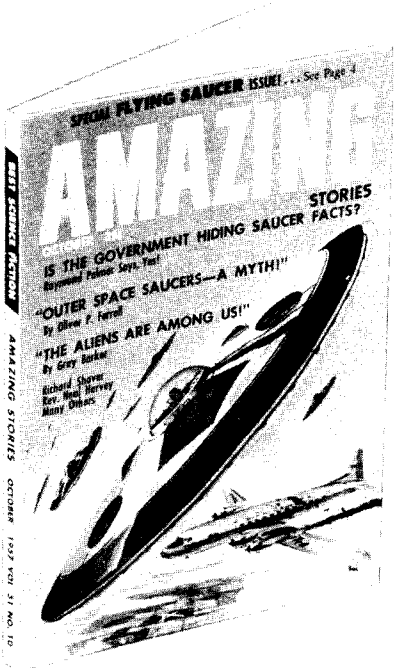
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BY THE EDITOR

o There's only one thing wrong with this issue. We're very much afraid that once you sit down with it, you'll read it from cover to cover in one sitting. Thus, you may miss an important appointment or come in late for work or show up for dinner after everything's cold. We don't want any of these things to happen, but at the same time we don't want you to miss the thrills you'll find in these pages. For instance:

John Van Akin smiled when he murdered his wife. He smiled when they put him on trial. And when they sentenced him to death, his grin fairly dazzled the courtroom. And he wasn't insane, either. You'll find out what *The Jewel of Ecstasy* had to do with all this.

And then there's the gal next door whose most private and personal moments were revealed in gorgeous color on the TV set of our hero in *I Married A Martian.* With phenomena of this type going on, was any gal safe?

And you'll probably read *A Code For Unbelievers* more than once. We hope you do, because there's a great truth hidden deep behind the fiction in this story; a truth we guarantee will be of great value to you if you dig it out and make it your own.

Don't overlook *Earth Specimen,* either. This is the story of one man saving the world from outerspace invaders through the medium of love; but love manifested in as novel a manner as we've ever heard of.

These are only a few of the stories that add up to just about the best issue of *Fantastic* that's hit the stands for many a moon. Happy reading! —PWF

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FICTION

JEWEL OF ECSTASY
By Henry Slesar..... 6

MR. FENBLEY'S NUDES
By Wilson Kane..... 45

I MARRIED A MARTIAN
By E. K. Jarvis..... 52

A CODE FOR UNBELIEVERS
By G. L. Vandenburg..... 66

EARTH SPECIMEN
By Gerald Vance..... 84

DANGER, RED!
By O. H. Leslie..... 102

APPOINTMENT WITH MR. ARMSTRONG
By D. E. Kaye..... 116

FEATURES

THE BOOK RACK..... 121

ACCORDING TO YOU 123

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JEWEL OF ECSTASY

By HENRY SLESAR

ILLUSTRATOR: FINLAY

What was the secret of the jewel that sharpened men's senses to a point where ecstasy itself became unbearable?

THE pocketsignal buzzed in the middle of the kiss that Ray Collier was bestowing on his fiancée, and Leona's eyes went mischievous at the sound.

"Lieutenant," she said archly. "Your mother's calling you."

Ray swore and turned off the instrument, clipped like a fountain pen to the pocket of his suit. He got up from the sofa and walked to the telephone. Then he dialed the number of police headquarters savagely.

"Collier checking in. Who wants me?"

"One sec, Lieutenant. In-

The scene was set,

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the orgiastic ritual about to begin.

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spector Charbis beepin' you." There was a click, and Charbis came on, growling like an old lion. "Collier? Where the hell are you?"

"Off duty, that's where. What's up?"

"Don't sound so snappish with me, lover boy. I know you're smooching with that doll of yours someplace, but this is important. We got a 540 from River Hill about an hour ago, and the patrol car reports the victim as Mrs. John Van Akin. I thought you'd go for the idea of a society-type murder."

"Van Akin?" Ray's voice lost all its disgruntledness. "You mean the millionaire?"

"Right you are. Interplanetary's number one boy. His wife was shot and killed about two hours ago, according to the coroner, and Van Akin himself has disappeared. Now I figured that since you'll be marrying into society in a few months—"

"Cut out the funny stuff, Inspector. Who's on the case?"

"I sent Harrigan on detail, but I'm willing to put you in charge. If you're interested."

Lieutenant Ray Collier was about to say an automatic yes, when he remembered the broken embrace on the sofa. He turned to look at Leona, curled up kittenishly and watching him with questioning violet eyes. It wasn't easy to look at Leona Adams and think of anything else but Leona. She was tall and lithe, but without a hint of angularity in her long body. Her blonde hair cascaded in a soft, unbroken wave to her shoulders, and her full lips seemed to be trembling at the memory of the uncompleted kiss. In three months, Leona would be Ray's bride, and the lieutenant was still puzzling over the miracle that made her want a cop for a husband.

"I don't know if I am interested," he said hesitantly.

"Well, it's up to you, pal. I told Harrigan to stay put if you didn't show. I'm sure he can handle it fine."

"Harrigan? That banana-fingered idiot?"

"Nothing wrong with Harrigan," the inspector growled. "But if you're so upset about it, get on the job yourself."

The phone clicked, and Ray dropped the receiver back with a bang. He returned to the sofa and tried to resume where he was interrupted, but Leona shifted away from him coquettishly.

"What's the matter?"

"What do you think, dar-

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ling? I want your *mind* on me, too."

"I'm sorry, Leona. It was a murder call—"

"So I gathered. Who was killed did he say?"

The lieutenant sighed and sat up, pushing back his unruly black hair. He was a young man, but gray hairs were already peppering the dark strands. "Somebody you might know. Somebody right out of your own social set. A Mrs. Van Akin."

Leona gasped. "You're joking! You don't mean *the* Mrs. Van Akin? John Van Akin's wife?"

"That's what I said. She was shot and killed in their apartment about an hour ago. The inspector wants me to take a look, but I said no."

"I didn't hear you say no."

"Well, that's what I meant."

"Did you, Ray?"

He looked at her, and his face relaxed with a grin.

"Why do you put up with me, Leona? I'm poor, I'm mean, and I'm a cop inside and out. What the hell makes you want to marry a bum like me?"

She put a finger on his lips. "Because you're so wickedly handsome. And also because you've got holes in your socks. And because you're just independent enough to walk out on me now and go poking around murder cases. Aren't you?"

The grin widened. "You're a mirage. You're going to vanish, bing! just before the wedding. You're too good to be true, Leona." He tried to put his arms around her, but she pushed him away.

"Better hurry, Lieutenant. Before the corpse gets cold."

Harrigan was directing things at the Van Akin apartment with an effective kind of brute authority. He nodded at the lieutenant when Ray came on the scene, and filled him in on the details.

"Elevator operator heard the shot," he said. "He went up to investigate and meets old Van Akin himself, looking flustered and grinning like a cat. He asked him if everything's okay, and Van Akin says everything's fine."

"That's funny," Ray said.

"Funny is right. Anyway, Van Akin goes downstairs and hails himself a taxi. The elevator guy says he was carrying a black satchel, looked like a doctor's bag. For some reason, the operator wasn't so sure everything was fine, so he goes back up. The door to the Van Akin apartment was not latched.

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He went inside, and this is what he saw."

Ray looked. The main room of the Van Akin residence was the size of a small railroad terminal. The body was midway between two enormous sectional sofas, and the blood that had left the gaping wound in the woman's side formed a damp red smudge that clashed unpleasantly with the pastel decor. She was a small, plump woman, with carefully-coiffed gray hair. The diamonds glinted everywhere on her throat and wrists. She was like somebody's mother, only richer.

"Then nobody else came to the apartment?" Ray said. "No other visitors?"

"Nobody all day," Harrigan answered, his big, homely face twisting grimly. "So you know where that leaves us."

"It's hard to believe. Van Akin wasn't the type to shoot his wife and walk out with a smile. Head of the biggest space-freighter company in the country—"

"It's a screwy one, all right."

Ray talked to the elevator operator, and repeated the substance of Harrigan's report.

"And this thing you said about Van Akin. This *look* he had—"

"Yeah." The operator went wide-eyed. "Grinning, just like he hit the daily double or somethin'. Never saw the old pot looking so happy."

"And you didn't hear the address he gave the cabbie?"

"Nope."

Ray frowned and turned to Harrigan. "We don't have any choice. Put out an all-state for Van Akin, and check all the hack listings. Just for questioning, remember; we can't make an arrest until we're sure."

The telephone tinkled discreetly in the foyer, and Ray took the call. It was a precinct sergeant, and his brief conversation electrified the lieutenant. He slammed down the phone and said:

"Hold everything. They just got a call at the station from a guy named Clay Bucknam, a pal of Van Akin's. Do you know him?"

Harrigan shrugged, but the elevator man said: "Sure, I know Mr. Bucknam. He was Van Akin's lawyer; he was always comin' up here for dinner and stuff. They used to play billiards or something together."

Ray said: "Well, it wasn't much of a friendship. Bucknam called to report that Van

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Akin was at his apartment, and had just confessed to murdering his wife."

"What?" Harrigan's mouth dropped.

"He was calling secretly from the bedroom. He wanted the police to get over there and pick him up."

"What are we waiting for?"

"It may be a false alarm. You stay here; I'll take a couple of the boys and investigate."

Harrigan pouted. "What's the matter, Collier? Can't you let me make *one* arrest?"

Ray Collier and his deputies burst into the Bucknam penthouse on Central Park South twenty minutes later. They found the millionaire Van Akin, a stoutish man in his late fifties, having a cocktail with Clay Bucknam, legal counselor for Interplanetary Services Corporation, the firm which Van Akin headed. The millionaire's round face looked startled at the entrance of the police; then the small mouth twisted in an angry snarl. He fought savagely when the blue-sleeved arms grasped his wrists, and he spat out words of violence and vengeance in the direction of the friend who had betrayed him.

"Take him in," Ray said to the officers. "I want to talk to Mr. Bucknam here."

Bucknam bowed slightly in the lieutenant's direction. He was a slight, dapper man, who took good care of himself. His thin face was hot-lamp treated, and his waxy-white hair and moustache were carefully trimmed. He watched the police carry off the shrieking Van Akin with a vaguely amused expression. Ray watched his face intently, chilled by the lawyer's cold-blooded disavowal of friendship.

"All right," Ray said when they were alone. "Let's hear what happened, Mr. Bucknam."

"There's not much to tell. John rang my doorbell about an hour ago, and I let him in. He was looking rather strange—"

"Grinning? Like a cat?"

"Not an imaginative description, but fairly accurate. I asked him if everything was all right, and he said yes. We had a martini, and he finally told me what had happened."

"Which was?"

"He said that he had killed Vera; that's his wife. He said they had had some kind of quarrel, and he'd lost his head and shot her. He was afraid to go to the police, so

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he came here. I'm his lawyer, you know; not just the company's attorney."

"Did he say what the argument was about?"

"No." Bucknam smiled thinly. "I could guess, however. John was fifty-seven, and entering a . . . romantic phase."

"You mean there was a woman?"

"I couldn't say for sure. At any rate, I excused myself when he gave me this rather startling information, and went into the bedroom to call the police. And that's all there is to it. Naturally, I'm shocked about the whole thing. It's real messy business."

"Naturally," Ray said drily. He stood up. "I'm afraid this won't be the last time I have to question you, Mr. Bucknam. We'll need a statement from you at headquarters."

"Quite all right," the lawyer said.

Ray went to the door, but paused with his hand on the knob.

"One more thing. What happened to the black bag Van Akin was carrying?"

"Bag?" John wasn't carrying anything."

"The elevator man at the apartment house said he was. Of course, he might have gotten rid of it before coming here."

"That's what he must have done; he was empty-handed when he arrived. Perhaps the murder weapon was—

"Yes," Ray said, cutting him off abruptly. "All right then, Mr. Bucknam. Thanks for your help, and you'll be hearing from us."

"My pleasure, Lieutenant," Clay Bucknam said, and from the satisfied look on his face, it obviously was.

The trial of John Van Akin was the delight of the newspaper - reading public, wearied by constant headlines of space exploration and high-level political gambits and all the other impersonal items of pith and moment which filled the columns. But they were disappointed in one way. The trial itself was brief, lasting less than four days. Van Akin refused counsel, despite the fact that his money could have brought the best legal brains of the country into his courtroom. And when faced by the judge's solemn opening question, Van Akin smiled contentedly and answered:

"Guilty."

His own testimony was to the point.

"Yes, I killed Vera. I shot

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her with a pistol, on the night of April Fourth. I killed her because I was tired of her, and because it seemed like the right thing to do. That's all I have to say."

And he smiled again, folding his plump white hands over his comfortable paunch, looking out at the juryroom audience as if expecting a round of applause.

On the second day, the judge asked for the report of the state psychiatric board. Their report was terse.

"The prisoner demonstrates signs of megalomania, but not to an extent that would warrant his being called insane."

And on the third day, the verdict was:

"Guilty of murder in the first degree."

On the morning of the fourth day, the judge said:

"John Van Akin, you have been found guilty of murder in the first degree. You are hereby sentenced to be taken to the State Prison at Ossining, New York, where on a date to be set by the prison warden, you will be put to death in the electric chair."

John Van Akin merely smiled.

To Lieutenant Ray Collier, the Van Akin case might have been another chore in a long line of chores. But now there was Leona, and Leona made a difference in everything.

"Well, you can't *blame* me for being curious," she said one night, halting her stream of questions. "I mean, most of your cases involve dope-peddlers and thugs, people like that. But Van Akin—"

"I know," Ray said sourly. "He was *society*. So that makes him interesting."

"Well, I never really *knew* the man. Father did, when he was alive. But I do remember Bucknam pretty well."

"You do? You never mentioned that before."

"Didn't I?" Leona looked in the wall mirror and patted her hair. "I haven't seen him in years, not since I was a little girl. As a matter of fact, I got an invitation from him just the other day—"

"You what?"

She laughed. "Now don't get cross. But Bucknam's having a party on the fifteenth, and he wants us to come."

"Us?"

"Of course, silly. He wrote it on the invitation: 'Please bring Lieutenant Collier.' I think it was sort of nice of him."

"A heck of a time to be

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giving a party. When his pal's sitting upstate, waiting to get jolted into Hell. You didn't accept, did you?"

"Why not? I haven't been to a party in years." She turned from the mirror, and her lovely mouth was pouting. "You're not going to be difficult about this, are you? We talked it all over, remember? You weren't going to give up your friends, and I wasn't going to give up mine."

"You don't call Bucknam a friend? If you could have seen his face the day we caught Van Akin—"

"It's not Bucknam I mean. There'll be lots of people I know at the party. People I'd like *you* to meet. You will come, won't you, Ray?"

"What if I said no? Would you go without me?"

Her eyes flashed suddenly. "Of course!"

"Okay," Ray grinned. "Just wanted to see that old Adams spirit. We'll go, sweetheart."

The night of the Bucknam party was one of red-tinged clouds and threatening rumbles from the west. When the taxi drew up before the apartment building, Ray Collier tugged at his formal collar and said: "Looks like we're in for a storm."

"Who cares?" Leona laughed, rustling out of the cab in a swirl of crimson satin.

Ray took her arm as they entered the elevator, marveling at her striking beauty in the formal gown. When they entered Bucknam's penthouse, the stares of the assembled guests proved that Ray wasn't the only one affected by Leona Adams' loveliness. The room was already crowded with the friends and associates of Clay Bucknam, and judging from their careless laughter and easy movements, they remained unaffected by the tragedy that had struck in their midst.

Bucknam, looking supremely well-tailored, came to greet them at the door. His heavy-lidded eyes were all for Leona.

"Wonderful of you to come," he said. "I think you'll find the evening interesting. I have a sort of special announcement to make a little later on, but right now lets get you people a drink. Looks like good drinking weather."

As if to punctuate his words, a clap of thunder broke outside the terrace windows. Some of the women squealed with exaggerated fright, grasping the arms of their escorts. Ray looked at Leona, and saw her eyes

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widen and lips part with strange joyfulness at the sound.

"I love thunder," she whispered. "Don't you, Ray?"

"I can take it or leave it."

"And lightning! I love lightning! That sudden flash of whiteness. It makes me feel —oh, I don't know. Wild. Naked."

"Let's get that drink," Ray said.

They got the drink, and several more, and circulated about the dress-suited men and formally-gowned women who clustered in small, transient groups, talking much about little, laughing at inane remarks, enjoying their own company, enjoying the effect they believed they were creating on the others. At ten, four waiters infiltrated the crowd, bringing delicacies on silver trays. Leona refused them laughingly, claiming she was feeling too good to dissipate the effect of the wine with anything so mundane as food.

"Think you ought to ease up?" Ray said, watching her flushed face. "You're not used to this stuff, Leona."

"Don't be so stuffy. I'm having fun, Ray!"

The lieutenant shrugged.

At five minutes before midnight, Clay Bucknam silenced their conversation and laughter with upraised arms.

"Ladies and gentlemen: If I could have your attention—"

They paused to listen, smiling in anticipation of some witticism.

"I have an announcement to make, one eminently suited to this atmosphere."

Outside, the lightning crackled.

"While we have enjoyed ourselves this evening, I'm sure none have forgotten the recent tragedy involving a dear friend of us all. I refer of course to John Van Akin."

A murmuring noise issued from the crowd in the room.

"As we know, our poor John has been sentenced to die in the electric chair, at a date not to be made public. However, I have learned that date from a completely reliable source, and will reveal it to you now. The date is July the Sixth. Tonight."

Now the sound was a gasp.

"Yes, tonight," Clay Bucknam said gravely. "As a matter of fact, John Van Akin is scheduled to die in the electric chair in exactly—" He glanced at his watch. "Two minutes and forty-five seconds."

The crowd reacted once more, and Ray said: "Of all

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the sadistic tricks! Let's get out of here, Leona."

"No!" She pulled away from him. "I want to hear this."

"I think it is only appropriate," Bucknam continued, "that we, John Van Akin's friends, pause in our moment of pleasure to pay our last respects. To say good-bye to dear old John, and to wish him godspeed."

Bucknam looked pointedly at the mantel. There was a large-faced ormulu clock, the hands almost meeting. The crowd fell silent, and the clock's ticking was loud in the room.

"One minute," Bucknam said dramatically.

"I want to leave," Ray whispered harshly in Leona's ear. "This is the cruelest thing I ever heard of. It's barbaric—"

"Forty-five seconds."

"Please, Ray!" Leona squirmed uncomfortably. "I just don't feel like leaving now."

"Thirty seconds."

They were all staring at the clock now, holding their breaths.

"Fifteen seconds."

A woman squealed in feminine horror, and another woman giggled.

"Five seconds," Clay Bucknam said. "Four—three—two—one."

The lights went out, and the women screamed. The illumination returned at once, and Bucknam silenced the buzzing guests with waving hands.

"It's all right; it's all right. Only the storm, folks—"

"That louse!" Ray said ferociously. "A little theatrical stunt, just to make things interesting. I ought to punch him in the nose. As a matter of fact—"

"Ray!" Leona gripped his arm. "Don't do anything silly. You have to be tolerant—"

"Tolerant? Of that miserable sadist? No, thanks. I just want to go, Leona. Are you coming with me?"

"No!"

"All right," the lieutenant said angrily. "Suit yourself."

He stalked away, and went out into the storm. He couldn't even feel the rain.

He was back in his apartment half an hour later, swearing at Clay Bucknam, swearing at Leona, swearing at the weather, and swearing most emphatically at himself. When the telephone rang, he answered it with a swear word that made Inspector

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Charbis more growly than ever.

"What the hell's eating you?"

"Nothing," Ray snapped. "I've just been to a party. I'm in a party mood."

"Well, I'm calling about a party, too," the inspector said. "A little party they had upstate a little while ago. Only it wasn't a success. It was a dismal failure."

"What are you talking about?"

"I just got a call from Ossining. They had the Van Akin execution scheduled for tonight, but something happened."

"Postponed?"

"No. They can't explain it, because the engineers up there claim the mechanism's perfect. But the fact is that Van Akin didn't die. He just sat there, grinning at 'em, but he didn't die."

"What?"

"You heard me. According to the warden, he laughed when they turned on the juice. They said they turned a million volts on him, and it didn't have any effect. Van Akin's alive."

"That's crazy. There *must* be something wrong with the chair."

"That's what I said, but they say no. It gives me the creeps, just thinking about it."

Ray stared at the receiver. "What happens now?"

"He'll have to be remanded for sentence again. That's the law."

"It's screwy. It doesn't make sense."

Charbis sighed. "Thanks, Collier. I wanted somebody else to feel miserable, too." And he hung up.

Ray sat in darkness, chewing on the strange news. There was a reasonable explanation, of course: a technical problem, an electronic accident. The newly-designed electric chair could kill in less than a quarter-second. But the picture of Van Akin, chuckling at the executioner while a million volts coursed through his body . . .

Then Ray thought of Leona, and wondered if she were home. He looked at his watch: it was fifteen minutes to three.

He dialed her home number, and a maid answered, sleepy-voiced.

"I'm sorry to call so late, Livy, but is Miss Adams still awake?"

"No, sir. Miss Adams not home yet."

"That can't be. It's almost three."

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"No, sir, Miss Adams not home."

He put the receiver back, and tried to decide if he was angry or worried. Then he left the apartment and took a cab back to the Bucknam penthouse.

There was a stillness about the apartment house that indicated the end of the festivities. He put a casual question to the elevator operator.

"Everybody gone home?"

"Yes, sir, far as I know. Mr. Bucknam's got some visitors, but I don't think they were at the party. Uniformed gentlemen."

"Police?"

"No, sir. Look more like pilots to me, sir."

"How about Miss Adams? The lady in the red dress?"

The operator chuckled. "Sure, I remember her, Got her a cab myself. She wasn't feeling any pain."

Puzzled, Ray stepped off the elevator. Where had Leona gone? Should he ask Bucknam?

He rang the doorbell, and Bucknam himself answered, still immaculate, but looking fatigued.

"If you're looking for Miss Adams, Lieutenant—"

"I know. But now that I'm here, suppose I come in a minute? I heard something tonight that may interest you."

Bucknam looked back over his shoulder, as if in doubt. Then he said: "All right, but make it brief. I've got some business, Lieutenant."

There were two men sitting in front of the cold fireplace, in the trim, dove-gray uniforms of Interplanetary Services. They didn't rise when he entered. Bucknam introduced them casually.

"Meet some friends of mine, Lieutenant. This is Captain Vorhees and Captain Danzig, both of the fleet."

They nodded at Ray without interest. Vorhees was a curly-headed young man with freckles and a humorous mouth, but there was no jollity in his expression. Danzig was a sullen, dark-eyed man.

"We can talk in here," Bucknam said, leading Ray to an anteroom.

Ray refused a chair, and said: "I got a call from headquarters tonight about your friend, Van Akin. Your little speech tonight was unnecessary. The execution wasn't held."

"I don't understand. My information was reliable."

"Maybe so. But Van Akin is alive."

"And this is what you wanted to tell me?"

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"Yes. And to ask if you knew where Leona Adams went. She didn't return home."

"Really, Lieutenant." Bucknam chuckled. "I should think you'd be better able to keep track of your fiancée than I. She left around one-thirty; I don't know any more than that. However, if you wish to look under my bed—"

Ray scowled, and went to the doorway. "Okay, Bucknam. Just thought you might know."

"Drop in again, Lieutenant. When I'm not so busy."

To himself, Ray swore that it would be a long time before he saw Clay Bucknam again. But he was wrong.

He reached home at four, and dialed the Adams home once more.

"I'm awful worried," the maid said. "Miss Adams still not home, Mr. Collier. Think I should call the police?"

"I *am* the police," Ray said dryly. "Never mind, Livy. She might have gone on to another party. Don't get panicky about Miss Adams; she can take care of herself."

He hung up, undressed, and went to bed.

And dreamed.

There were grinning phantoms dancing in his brain: Van Akin, grinning at the executioner as he sat in the electric chair. Bucknam, grinning as he proposed a toast to the dying. And Leona, grinning as she stood on the tip of a precipice, her golden hair streaming behind her as the lightning crackled and thunder rolled and crashed around the mountain tops in accompaniment to her laughter, laughter that rang out into the stormy night like jangling bells.

The bells woke him up. It took him a while to comprehend that the sound was real.

He picked up the telephone by his bed.

"Yes?"

"Lieutenant—" It was a mockery of a human voice, grating out the word in an ugly hoarse whisper.

"Who is this?"

"Lieutenant, help me . . . help me . . ."

"Who is it?" Ray said, sitting up, his spine icing with the awfulness of the sound.

"Bucknam, Bucknam," the voice said. "Please help me . . . help me . . ."

"Bucknam? Are you all right? What's happened?"

There was silence. Not the click of a phone; merely silence.

Ray dressed hastily, and for the third time in the past

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twelve hours, returned to the apartment of Clay Bucknam. There was dawn breaking over the penthouse by the time he reached the door.

It was unlatched. When he pushed it open and walked into the Bucknam living room, the thing on the Bucknam sofa caused him to cry out.

He stepped closer, and knew that the thing was Bucknam himself. But in the brief two hours that had passed since their last meeting, the dapper, immaculate figure that had been Clay Bucknam had become an object of terrifying, sickening, almost obscene horror. The dress suit had been torn and shredded from the body as if with a ragged blade, and that same blade had been equally merciless with Bucknam's body. Blood was streaming everywhere, carving rivers of crimson into the sofa and the carpet. One eye was gone from its socket, and the arms hung limp and broken from the narrow shoulders. The fingers of the hands had lost all semblance to human fingers; they were twisted and broken into unrecognizable shapes. Ray's eyes couldn't pause long enough to catalog all the horrors that had been perpetrated on Bucknam's body. He turned away from the loathsome sight and retched dryly.

Then he started to the telephone, to call for help, but the thing on the sofa made a ghastly sound that stopped him. He forced himself to come closer.

"Collier . . . Collier . . ."

"What happened?" Ray said, marveling that the thing was still alive and speaking.

"Kill me," the voice pleaded. "Kill me, Collier . . ."

"Who did this to you?" Ray shouted at him, not able to look back at the solitary eye that stared fixedly.

"Find a way," Bucknam croaked. "Find a way, Collier. I can't . . . stand the pain . . ."

"I want to help you, Bucknam. But you have to tell me what happened. Was it those men tonight, the pilots from Interplanetary?"

Bucknam was silent, but his lips were moving. Ray leaned even closer.

"I can't die," Bucknam was whispering. "I can't die, Collier. Help me to die . . ."

Ray stood up and went to the telephone. But before he dialed the number that would bring medical aid to the bleeding thing in the apartment, he suddenly recalled an earlier

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telephone conversation that night.

"Van Akin," he said aloud. "He couldn't die, either—"

He placed the call, and then returned to Bucknam.

"They'll be here soon," he promised. "But you have to tell me, Bucknam. You have to tell me everything. Why did this happen to you?"

"It's the jewel," Bucknam rasped. "The jewel of Alpuria . . . the jewel of ecstasy . . ."

"What jewel, Bucknam? Were you robbed? Is that what happened?"

Bucknam didn't answer. The single eye had closed, as as if merciful unconsciousness had come at last.

In the office of Inspector Charbis, Ray Collier's superior threw back his leonine head and roared in protest at the lieutenant's question.

"Now look, Collier! I've got enough troubles on my mind without worrying about your love life. We've got the worst damned outbreak of homicide the east has seen in fifty years. We got a murderer we can't execute. We got a man tortured to death, who won't die. And you're asking me to drop everything to find your girl friend—"

"I didn't say that," Ray answered tightly. "Leona's mixed up in this crazy business some way, Inspector. I think her disappearance has something to do with Bucknam—maybe even Van Akin."

"Nuts! You said you had a fight, didn't you? Well, Leona's a big girl. She decided to leave town and let you stew in your own juice for a while. That's what I think."

"Maybe. Only I think it's more than that—"

"Well, let Missing Persons worry about it. You're on Homicide Detail now, Collier. And you've got a lot of work on your hands. There were twelve murders in the city last night. *Twelve* of them! I've got every newspaper in town on my neck. The Commissioner's been ringing my phone all morning. Next thing you know, they'll be sending congressional investigators down here—"

"Chief, if you'll just let me follow up on this Bucknam case—"

"I told you to forget it. Harrigan is down at Interplanetary Services this minute, looking for those space jockeys you told us about. He'll bring 'em in and we'll question them."

Ray stood up and went to the door, and Charbis half-moaned and half-growled, and said:

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"Look, boy, I'm sorry about this Leona business. I know you're worried about her, but the world's gotta go on spinning. You've got a job to do. Meanwhile, I'll goose Missing Persons into doing everything they can. Okay?"

"Thanks," Ray muttered.

Outside the office, he ran into Harrigan. The big man was looking sheepish.

"What's up?" Ray said. "Did you find Vorhees and Danzing?"

"No," Harrigan frowned. "I checked with space control and they told me they were on assignment. Piloting some freighter out to the Adelphi system."

Ray cursed. "That's a neat getaway. Did you tell I.S. to recall them?"

"Sure. But they said they were beyond radio contact. And they're not due back from Alpuria until the end of the year—"

"Alpuria?" The name of the planet jogged Ray's memory. "That's what Bucknam said—"

"Said what?"

"Alpuria. The jewel of Alpuria. That's what Bucknam told me, before he passed out."

"What jewel? There ain't no gems on Alpuria. It's no mining planet—"

"Just the same, that's what Bucknam said. Maybe it wasn't a jewel he was talking about, not a real one. Maybe an allegorical kind of jewel—"

"Come again?"

"Never mind," Ray said, moving on. "Excuse me, pal — I've got work to do."

He was telling the truth. The cases were piling up by the hour in the Homicide Bureau, and they gave Lieutenant Ray Collier a week of work that surpassed anything in his memory. It seemed as if the city had gone murder-mad, as if a contagion of some deadly, murder-inspiring virus had been spreading wildly through the streets. Few of the killings were confined to the normal trouble spots of the city, nor to the dangerous breeds of men who accounted for so much crime. It was the solid citizenry who seemed to have contracted the ailment: placid, easy-going husbands who suddenly and violently ended the lives of their spouses. An elderly and gentle school teacher, strangling a young child. A small business man, slaying his partner. A policeman, senselessly shooting a bartender. A lovely young girl, stabbing her best friend

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to death in the quiet corridors of a stenographic school.

Few of the murders went unsolved, but the ceaseless parade of reports kept Ray busy from early morning to late evening. In one respect, his work load was beneficial: it kept his mind too active to worry about Leona's mysterious disappearance.

At the end of the week, the murders suddenly ceased, as if the virus had lost its power. And at the end of the week, Ray Collier had his first clue about his missing fiancée.

It came about during the investigation of a homicide, involving a taxi-driver named Frank Blough, a moon-faced, sad-eyed man who had butchered his wife on the same evening of Clay Bucknam's torture. Ray questioned him for hours, and his sullen, insolent answers infuriated the lieutenant.

"Now come on!" he said savagely, itching to batter the leering round face that looked back at him across the desk. "You haven't got a prayer, Blough. We've got two witnesses who'll swear they saw you kill your wife. You were pretty damned careless about it. So let's stop wasting each other's time—"

Blough shrugged. "Can I smoke?"

"No, you can't smoke! You can't do anything until you talk. I want a full and detailed confession, and I want it now!"

"Oh, yeah? Or else what, Lieutenant? Third-degree? I thought that you guys never roughed anybody up?"

"I'd like to, Blough, don't be mistaken about that." Then his voice softened, and he pulled up a chair. "Look, fella, we've been asking around about you. Everybody says you're a pretty straight guy. You don't have any record. You were even cited for meritorious service, when you turned in those guys who tried to hold you up. You've been in the army; you've got four decorations. Everybody says you were a nice, easy-going guy. So what happened? What made you do it?"

Blough sneered. "You're breaking my heart, Lieutenant. I didn't deny killin' my wife, did I? What more do you want?"

"I want the reasons! I want to know why you did it!"

"Because I wanted to!" Blough snapped. "That's all you have to know, ain't it?"

"But why?"

"Because she was gettin'

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fat!" Blough shouted. "That's why. Now let's break this up, huh?"

Ray stared at him, searching his face. "You trying to be funny?"

"No! I killed her because she was gettin' fat. I never liked fat women, and I told her a million times to lay off the junk she eats. You think she ever listened? The hell she did. She was gettin' big as a house. So I went home and picked up the kitchen knife —" He chuckled suddenly. "I says to her, I says, 'Okay, Norma, let's get some of that fat offa you now—' "

Ray Collier's mouth twisted. "You're crazy—"

Blough laughed. "Okay, Lieutenant. So put me in a booby hatch. You're the boss."

"What time was all this?"

"Around three-thirty."

"Were you off duty?"

"Nah. But after I dropped my last passenger, I got to thinking about Norma, and decided to head home."

"Where'd you take your last passenger?"

"Airport. She was a real beautiful dame." His eyes glowed, and he moistened his lips. "A real sexy dame, in a red dress. Like this—" He outlined a curvaceous figure with a lascivious gesture of his hands. "I guess maybe that's what started me thinkin' about Norma. She used to have a nice figure, too."

"Red dress?" Ray looked up. "Where'd you pick up the call?"

"Over on Central Park South, I forget where."

"Margrave Apartments?" Ray said intensely.

"Could be. She was a blonde, really built. Kinda tall and slim, but built. And she was carryin' a little black bag—"

The lieutenant struggled to keep the excitement out of his voice. "What kind of a bag? Do you remember?"

"Just an ordinary black bag." The taxi-driver put his hand to his head, as if his temples were throbbing. "Wait a minute. There was something else. She showed me what was in the bag—"

"She showed you?"

"Yeah. I—I forgot about it until now. I dunno why. It wasn't somethin' you could forget easy."

"What was it?"

"A jewel. Biggest damn jewel you ever saw in your life. Shining and flashin' like a diamond, big as a man's head. Never saw anything like it . . ."

Ray held his breath.

"Okay, Mr. Blough," he

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said at last. "That's all for today."

The day after, Ray visited the city hospital where Clay Bucknam had been deposited, and where the puzzled physicians assigned to his case waited for the lawyer's inevitable death. But Bucknam, a grisly remnant of a human being, still lived. More than that, the lawyer seemed to be making a startling and rapid recovery.

When the lieutenant entered the room, Bucknam was propped up in bed, swathed in bandages that covered every inch of his abused body, with one small slit allowing the lawyer's single eye access to sight. Ray grimaced at the image, but came closer to the bed.

"Well, Lieutenant," Bucknam's ghostly voice said, muffled behind the bandages. "Nice of you to visit me."

"This isn't a social call," Ray answered. "You know what we want, Bucknam. We want the story. We want to know what happened to you."

"And what if I don't choose to tell you?"

Ray hitched a chair to the bed, and dropped his voice. "I'll tell you what," he said passionately. "I'll arrange a little deal with the doctors on your case. I'll see to it that they stop the narcotics that are keeping you out of pain. I'll let you suffer, Bucknam, don't think I won't."

"You can't do that," the lawyer sneered. "You're too humane."

"That's what you think," Ray kept his voice level, trying to make the bluff sound authentic. "But I'm sick and tired of this business, Bucknam; I'll do anything I can to find out what's going on. Even if it means making you scream."

Bucknam was silent for a moment, then he leaned back against the pillows with a sigh.

"All right," he said. "I'll tell you what happened."

Ray looked relieved.

"It started six months ago," Clay Bucknam said, in a voice so muted and low that the lieutenant strained to hear it. "Interplanetary Services sent a routine freighter-flight out to Alpuria, the third planet in the Adelphi System. The pilots were Captains Vorhees and Danzig, and their job was simply to establish a trading set-up with the Alpurians, a Class D-4 humanoid race, who lived in a crude, primitive society that was rapidly deteriorating. They're a belligerent, hostile people,

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physically far below Earth-strength, but sufficiently strong to kill each other off, which they have been doing for some twelve Earth-centuries. The population is less than nine or ten thousand, and all the anthropological and geneticist experts predict that it will be nil in another four or five decades. I. S. was interested in the trading route because of certain botanical specimens found in the jungle areas of the planet's equatorial zone. It wasn't a terribly important mission; that's why we sent Vorhees and Danzig. Neither are pilots of the first rank."

He paused, and Ray waited impatiently.

"They returned about three months ago, but they didn't appear at I. S. headquarters to make their report. Instead, they went straight to Van Akin."

"Van Akin? Why?"

"They wanted to see the big boss; they said they had made a discovery of vital importance. Neither were great brains, Lieutenant, but in this case, they were right. Van Akin knew it the moment he saw what they had in the little black bag."

"A jewel?"

"That's right, Lieutenant." Bucknam chuckled dryly. "A fantastic jewel, weighing thousands of carats, as perfect as the most perfect diamond ever discovered on Earth. Only it wasn't hard like a diamond and it was far more rare and precious. It was no color and it was all colors; it was fire and ice and beauty and ugliness. It was bigger than a man's head, and so flawless you could see down to its depths. In the proper light, it could blind a man forever. It was alive!"

Bucknam was trembling.

"I first saw the gem on the night of Vera Van Akin's murder. Van Akin brought it to my apartment in that little black bag you've heard about. He had bought it from Vorhees and Danzing, for some fantastic price, but he told me confidentially that he intended to stop payment on the check before they could cash it. As I said, they weren't very bright boys, or they would have insisted on cash."

"Why would he want to cheat them? If the jewel was so valuable—"

"He didn't care about that," Bucknam laughed. "Any more than he cared about killing Vera. That's all part of it, Lieutenant. Don't you see?"

"No."

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"Nothing matters after the jewel, Lieutenant," Bucknam said dreamily. "You'll find that out, some day. Nothing matters at all . . ."

"What are you talking about?"

"You'll see, you'll see," the lawyer said. "Once you face the jewel, you *know*."

"Know what?"

"That nothing is important, nothing but yourself and your own desires, your own necessities, your own—ecstasy. That's what it really is, Lieutenant. A jewel of ecstasy . . ."

"You're not making sense, Bucknam."

"Of course not. Not to *you*, Collier, not to you. But then, you haven't seen the gem. You don't know. You're living in the old narrow world you were born in, without realization of the truth that lies inside the jewel. The real truth, Lieutenant, the truth that's been hidden from man since the beginning, hidden from our eyes since Eden. Eden! Now that's an idea. Perhaps this was the Fruit itself, Lieutenant. The Forbidden Fruit they wrote about. Maybe this was what they meant . . ."

Ray didn't know what to think. Was Bucknam raving? Had the torture unbalanced his mind? It seemed like the only explanation.

"Anyway," the lawyer continued, "Van Akin brought the jewel to show me. Once I saw it, my eyes were opened as his were. I knew that nothing was important in the universe but Self. I would have killed him then myself, but his confession about Vera gave me an easier route. So I telephoned the police."

"And where's the jewel now?"

Bucknam snickered.

Ray repeated his question.

"You really don't know, Lieutenant? Or are you just pretending ignorance? Or perhaps you don't want to know . . ."

"All right," Ray said angrily. "Then let's hear about the night of the party. After I found you with Vorhees and Danzig. What happened when I left?"

"They were after the jewel, of course. They had long since learned that the check Van Akin had given them was rubber, but with the publicity about the murder so intense, they couldn't get their revenge. But then their giant intellects went to work, and reasoned that I might be the possessor of the gem. They were right, of course. They

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wanted me to give it to them, but I wouldn't. That's when they—did what they did."

"Why didn't you give it to them?"

"Because I couldn't. Because the jewel wasn't in the apartment any longer."

"Didn't you tell them that?"

"Of course. But they wouldn't believe me, the fools. They had to cut it out of me, with knives—"

"And where was the jewel?"

"Gone, Lieutenant. Stolen. It was my own fault, of course; I should have been more careful."

"And who stole it?"

Bucknam's facial bandages moved, as if the remnant of a mouth behind the cloth was twisting in a smile.

"Someone very dear to you, Lieutenant," Clay Bucknam said. "Someone very close . . ."

Ray Collier got up, and left the hospital room before the ghastly voice could speak Leona's name.

The dumbfounded face of Inspector Charbis began to tremble with confused emotions.

"Collier," he said softly, "if I didn't know you so well I'd say you'd flipped your wig. You really mean what you're saying?"

"I do," Ray said heatedly. "There's some crazy kind of power in this jewel that Bucknam told me about. Something right out of hell. Something that makes people care about nothing but their own good, that deprives them of every moral sense that civilization has given them. And something more, Inspector. Something that makes them—immortal. They simply can't die."

"That's the nuttiest part of all, Collier—"

"But that's the part easiest to prove, Inspector. Look at the evidence. Van Akin, shot through with a million volts of electricity. Still alive. Bucknam, tortured to such a degree that he should have been dead weeks ago. Still alive. Both of them saw that gem. Both of them are behaving like the wildest beasts that ever roamed the jungle. And then there's Blough, the hackie. He saw the jewel, and went home to kill his wife. Wait until that execution takes place, Inspector. It'll be the Van Akin fiasco all over again. And God knows how many other murders we can attribute to this hellish stone—"

"One word of this," Charbis said thunderously. "One word of this to anybody, Col-

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lier, and I'll ride you out of the force. Understand me?"

"Then you don't believe me?"

"I didn't say that. Maybe every word is gospel, but I don't want such a story to come out of my department. Not until we have every shred of evidence buttoned down."

"But you don't really understand, Inspector. Even if we find this jewel, our problems won't be solved. They'll just be started! Anybody who sees it—just *sees* the damned thing—becomes like Van Akin, like Bucknam, like Blough, like—" He swallowed hard. "God forbid — like Leona must be right now."

"Well, what else can we do? We can't do anything until we find this nutty diamond of yours."

Ray started to raise his voice. "But it's not as simple as that! We *can't* treat this like an ordinary police matter, Inspector. We need help. Scientific help. Advice. We can't blunder along on this thing—"

"Blunder?" Charbis roared. "Who's talking about blunders?"

"But don't you see? If you see the jewel, if *I* see it—I won't care about solving this problem anymore. I won't care about anything but myself!"

The inspector shook his white mane and frowned. "I think you're working too hard, Collier. I think maybe you can use a little rest. A leave of absence . . ."

"You can't take me off the case! You can't drop it this way, now that we know—"

"Don't tell me what I can do, Collier. I'm ordering you off the Bucknam business right now. And I'm ordering you out of the department for a month. You're in no condition to keep on working; you're heading for a breakdown. Don't argue! That's my decision."

Ray glared at his superior. Then he turned and stalked out of his office.

At New York Airport, the flight-checkers of the city's twelve airlines were less than helpful to Ray Collier in his unofficial search for Leona Adams' whereabouts. Not less than thirty planes had taken off the night of the Bucknam party, and without police sanction, there was no way he could check the manifests. If ever he could have used his badge, it was then—but his badge was in the top drawer of Inspector Charbis' desk.

He returned home sadly,

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feeling wearier than he had ever felt in his life. He bought an evening paper, and read the news reports. Every item seemed strangely unimportant, as if the doings of mankind at this moment in history seemed like petty games. If Bucknam's story was the truth, nothing mattered but a strange, oversized gem, of no color and of all colors, of great beauty and ugliness, a jewel that transported men to an ecstasy of selfishness and immortality.

Leona! The thought of his fiancée was like a stab of pain. Where was she now? What was she like?

Then he saw the item in the center section.

It was a one-column affair, only six inches long. And the headline was:

Hofstra Galleries to Exhibit Unusual Interstellar Diamond

Pittsburgh, July 30. Lawrence Hofstra, president of the Hofstra Jewelry Company, announced the forthcoming exhibit of a spectacular 7200-carat gem, purported to be of the "diamond" family. The jewel, discovered on the planet Alpuria of the Adelphi System, is said to be the largest of its type ever displayed in this country. The exhibition will take place on August 3rd, at the Hofstra Galleries, 105 West Carnegie.

Ray reread the item several times, and each time the mental picture it created filled him with mounting horror. A public exhibition of the jewel of Alpuria! A thousand pairs of eyes viewing the hellish gem. A thousand more victims for the demoniac power of the jewel—a thousand more potential murderers, thieves, immorals, immortals!

He tried to organize the thoughts that were crowding into his head. Should he call Hofstra and warn him of the consequences? Would it do any good? Wouldn't Hofstra himself be already a victim of the gem's evil influence?

There was only one course to follow. He would have to go to the Pittsburgh jeweler himself. He would have to stop the exhibition. He'd have to do anything he could to prevent the extension of the jewel's malignant power—even to destroying it.

He called New York Airport, and made a reservation.

Lawrence Hofstra's office door remained closed to the lieutenant for two hours, while he waited impatiently

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on the leather chair outside. When he was finally given permission to enter, Ray's blood pressure was dangerously high. But the small, delicate man behind the massive desk didn't seem concerned by his obvious annoyance.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Collier?" he said, with a pursed-lip smile. "My secretary said something about the police . . ."

"That's right. But I'm not here in any official capacity, Mr. Hofstra. As a matter of fact, I'm on a leave of absence."

"Ah," the little man said. He patted the thick white hair that covered his temples, and then made a small effeminate gesture with his hands. "Then I don't have to worry about being pinched, do I?" He giggled softly.

"No. But you've got something else to worry about, Mr. Hofstra. This jewel of yours—"

"The Alpurian gem?"

"That's the one. I presume you've—" He hesitated. "I presume you've seen it."

"Naturally." The little man's eyes sparkled, and he leaned forward. "Have you?"

"No. And I don't want to see it, Mr. Hofstra. More important, I don't want *anybody* to see it. I'm sure you must know what I'm talking about."

"Perhaps" Hofstra smiled. "And perhaps not. I had quite a little debate with myself over that. Once you see the jewel, you're rather torn. You don't know whether you want to hide it from sight, or show it to the whole world. I decided upon the latter, Mr. Collier, for after all, that's my business."

"You realize the danger, of course? You know what the jewel can do?"

"Only too well, Mr. Collier. But my interest, you must remember, is pecuniary. I wish to sell the gem for the highest price possible. I paid quite a high price for it myself."

"To whom?" Ray said.

"To a lovely young woman. A Miss Adams."

Ray's shoulders slumped.

"I've never made a more desirable purchase," Hofstra said. "Not only from a business point of view, Mr. Collier—I see that you recognize that. But the gem has opened my eyes to a great truth about myself, a truth I have always been reluctant to admit. I feel truly free for the first time in my life. Can you say that's bad?"

"It depends," Ray an-

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swered carefully. "Sometimes that truth can be harmful. Sometimes, it can be downright disastrous."

"Not in my case, Mr. Collier. Not in my case."

He leaned closer across the desk, and his hand touched the lieutenant's arm.

"It's good to know the truth about oneself, Mr. Collier. Don't you agree?"

Ray jerked his arm away. "Perhaps, Mr. Hofstra. But I still want to know if you intend to go through with this insane exhibit of yours."

Hofstra sighed. "I do, Mr. Collier. I most decidedly do."

Ray drew the service revolver from the shoulder holster.

"Then I have to do this, Mr. Hofstra. I want that jewel, and I want it now."

The little man blinked, and then laughed.

"You forget something," he said.

"I don't forget anything. I know I can't kill you, Mr. Hofstra. But I can do something a lot worse. I can put you in such terrible pain that you'll scream for the release of death. I saw a man in such a condition, and the sight wasn't pleasant."

"You can't bluff me, Mr. Collier. You're still one of the humane ones. You haven't seen the jewel."

"Are you really sure?"

Hofstra hesitated. "What—what would you do?"

"Torture you, Mr. Hofstra. Beat you until death would be the kindest thing that could happen. I won't hesitate for a minute to protect the world from this horror of yours—"

Hofstra was breathing heavily, his eyes fixed intently on Collier's face.

"You'll really do that? You'll hurt me?"

"I will, Mr. Hofstra."

Hofstra's face started to work with some strange emotion.

"Please," he blubbered. "Please . . ."

"It's no use, Mr. Hofstra. I'm deadly serious about this. I want the jewel of Alpuria—"

"Please! Please! Do what you say. Beat me. Torture me. Please!"

Collier stared at him, and the little man reached across the desk to grasp his lapels.

"Do it!" Hofstra sobbed. "Do it, Mr. Collier. I won't complain, I promise! But beat me, beat me, beat me!"

Collier stepped back in loathing and disgust, trying to tear the claw-like hands from his clothing. The jew-

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eler hung on desperately, his mouth working wetly, his eyes shining, imploring.

"Please, please!" Hofstra said. "Do it, do it, do it! I want you to, I want you to . . ."

Ray squirmed from his grasp, sickened by the sight, and knew that his threats of violence were only words of love to the degenerated creature whose worst impulses had been magnified by the jewel's deadly power. He tore the clutching hands away, and shoved backwards, until Hofstra fell back over the desk, trembling with the ugly emotion that had possessed him.

Then Ray whirled and left the office, fighting the revulsion that was twisting his stomach.

On August 4th, a day after the exhibition of the jewel of Alpuria, the City of Pittsburgh was victimized by an outbreak of criminal violence that had no parallel in police history. Openly committed thefts, sexual offenses, brutality, and murder became commonplace on the streets of the city. Two hundred major crimes were committed in the space of less than twenty-four hours, and the strength of the local peace forces was taxed to the breaking point. The mayor pleaded to the state government for immediate aid, and a detachment of National Guardsmen and even federal law officers were on the scene the next day. But still the crime wave continued, an unchecked contagion that affected every income and education class, every age group. The toll at the week's end was thirty-five murders, a hundred assaults, five hundred and ninety petty crimes of looting, thievery, and violence.

Six days after his unsuccessful visit to the Hofstra Company, Lieutenant Ray Collier stepped out of a municipal helicopter at the 'copterport in Salem, Massachusetts. From there, he took a taxi to the tree-shaded home of a man he hadn't seen in five years—a man who had never seen him.

The man was waiting in the doorway of the house when Ray came up the walk, sucking on an unlit pipe and waving his hand. Ray waved back, and then remembered that Don Valens couldn't see his greeting. Valens had been a police captain when Ray first joined the force as a patrolman, a vigorous, grinning, physically overpowering man whose courage and good na-

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ture had earned him friends on both sides of the law. Then, in a police battle with a dope-crazed hoodlum, Valens had his career ended abruptly and violently, by a bullet that had cost him his sight.

Valens ushered Ray into the living room of his house, apologized for the disorder, and showed him to a seat. He went into the kitchen and returned with steaming cups of coffee, and then took a chair by the fireplace. He lit a pipe, leaned back, and asked Ray what his mission was.

"I'm sorry," Ray said, blinking at the blind man. "I'd heard about this kind of thing before, but when you actually see it—I mean, you really get around fine, Don. You'd never know—"

Valens chuckled. He was no longer so big and robust, and his curly black hair was grey. "It's the old compensation story, Ray. I've got ears like an Indian, and a kind of sixth sense about solid objects in my path. It's not as good as having eyes, though—don't let them kid you about that."

"I'm sorry," Ray said again. "But the truth is this, Don. In the spot I'm in now, not having eyes would be a blessing, if I could get around like you do."

Valens looked interested. "Okay. Let's hear the story."

Ray told it. He told it fast, and as concisely as if it were a police report. Valens listened without comment, making sucking noises on the stem of his pipe. His face showed no disbelief and no surprise, and when Ray was finished, he tapped the empty bowl against an ashtray and said:

"So where do I come in, Ray?"

"I thought maybe you'd understand that. Someone like you can be the only answer to this thing. In this case, my worst enemy are my own eyes. If I see this thing, this crazy jewel of ecstasy, I'm a goner. And so is anyone else."

"Immortality," Valens said dreamily. "A lot of people would like that."

"That's the worst of it. Once word gets out that this jewel carries the gift of never-ending life, there won't be any stopping them. They'll *want* to see the jewel, even if it turns them into these selfish, amoral monsters they become. It would mean the end of everything, Don—you must be able to see that." He stopped, embarrassed.

"*That,*" Don Valens said with a grin, "I can see. And just what do you want me to do?"

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"I want you to steal the gem. It's on exhibit right this minute, in the Hofstra Galleries. Every day, another four or five hundred visitors get a look at it—and every day the crimes are mounting up. I want you to steal it, Don, so I can find a way to destroy it forever."

Valens looked thoughtful. "Doesn't sound so easy. A jewel like that—they must have taken good precautions. Especially when it has an effect like that."

"Oh, they're cautious, all right. Hofstra's no fool. He's exhibiting the jewel because he wants publicity for his company, and a high price for the gem. But he's too smart to run the risk of theft. That's why he's using optical mirrors."

"Using what?"

"It's a trick I learned about when working on a museum case a couple of years ago. Some smart cookie figured out an optical system that works on a brand-new principle, that makes an object to appear to be one place when it's really in another. *Trompe d'oeuil* stuff; fool-the-eye. You could swear the jewel of Alpuria was sitting in an innocent glass case, but in actuality it's somewhere else. And I know where that somewhere else is. Because when I visited Lawrence Hofstra's office the other day, I saw a strange rectangular device in the corner of his room. It was mocked-up to look like a piece of furniture, but I recognized a similar object from this museum business. I think the jewel of ecstasy is in easy access, right in Hofstra's own office—in a place no thieves would ever think of looking."

Valens chuckled. "Clever, if it's true. But not so clever, if people like you can detect this little trick of his. So what am I supposed to do? Walk in his office and just lift the thing?"

Ray lifted a notebook from his jacket pocket and flipped the cover to look at his painstaking scrawls.

"That's exactly what I want you to do, Don. I've got the whole plan of action worked out to the last detail. All you've got to do is say yes."

Valens filled his pipe before answering. Then he said, "Yes," and struck a match.

In his hotel room, Lieutenant Ray Collier paced the newspaper-strewn floor and waited.

On the mantel, a ship's-wheel clock ticked loudly, the big hands moving across the

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face with tortuous slowness.

It was five minutes of five, an hour and a half after Don Valens had been despatched on his errand.

In his mind, Ray reviewed the timetable he had set for Valens. At four o'clock, he would gain entrance to the jewelry man's office. He would chat for some fifteen minutes with Hofstra, and make a point of showing his pupilless, sightless eyes by removing his dark glasses. This was necessary to put Hofstra off guard, to prevent him from sensing the danger Valens represented. At four-twenty, Valens, guided by his uncanny senses, would suddenly and violently strike out at Hofstra and render him unconscious. It must be done silently, swiftly, before the jeweler could cry out for help.

Then, at four twenty-five, Valens was to move to the left corner of the office, where the rectangular, cloth-covered object concealed the mechanism that sent the lifelike image of the jewel of Alpuria to the showcase in the gallery below.

He was to open the mechanism, and withdraw the jewel.

At four-thirty, he was to place the jewel in the chunky suitcase brought for the purpose, open the door, and bid the unconscious jeweler a loud and cheerful good-bye.

Then he was to walk calmly out of the office. At about four thirty-five, he was to step into a taxi and give the driver the address of Ray Collier's Pittsburgh hotel.

The trip should have taken ten minutes; fifteen at the most. Any moment, the front door should open, and the blind man should enter with his extraordinary trophy.

But the door didn't open.

Ray looked at the clock again, and kept on looking. It was five-thirty before he tore his eyes away, and went anxiously to the window.

Still no sign of Valens.

Then he began to curse himself, curse his folly in allowing the blind ex-detective to take part in so dangerous a mission. If anything happened to Valens, it was *his* fault.

Then he thought of the power that lay in the depths of the jewel, and knew that even the sacrifice of another man's life was worth the attempt.

At six, he telephoned the Hofstra Company. There was no answer.

He ordered a meal from

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room service at eight, but found that he couldn't touch the food that arrived half an hour later.

At ten, he heard the sound of shouting in the streets, and opened his hotel window in time to see two women locked in a death struggle, while their escorts stood by and chuckled at the comedy of the sight. One of the women screamed as the other found a long nail file in her purse, and—

He turned his head from the sight.

At midnight, he fell into a heavy sleep, fully-clothed.

He was awakened by a discreet knock on the door, that became louder as he resisted its effect. He opened it on a pale-faced bellhop, who handed him a letter and apologized for the hour.

"Man said it was very important, Mr. Collier," he said apologetically. "I'm sorry—"

"Okay, kid," Ray said, shutting the door.

He tore at the blank envelope with trembling fingers.

The note read:

Dear Mr. Collier:

Thank you. A blind man is exactly what we required. How thoughtful of you to provide him! If you wish to attend our ceremonies, where you may see Mr. Valens perform for us, consider this an invitation from

The Immortals

The words filled Ray with a horror he couldn't stop to define. He turned the note over and found an address:

7 Fire Lane, Phaeton, Connecticut, August 9th. Ceremonies begin promptly at midnight.

"Tomorrow," he said aloud.

He picked up the hotel phone, and asked for the airport. The whole thing seemed like a hideous nightmare.

The town of Phaeton had the smell of money. Once it had been a small, pleasant community, unaffected by the ring of suburban dwellings that had begun to surround it during the middle of the twentieth century. But the ring had closed tighter and tighter around the town's neck, until it squeezed out the remaining residents and left only a smug, insular, and monied group who had adopted the town as their own. It boasted the highest per-capita income of any community in the nation, and its rigid standards, and even more

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rigid zoning laws, had kept it an isolated outpost.

It had always been an uneasy experience merely to pass through the town of Phaeton. It made Ray Collier more than uneasy to call upon the town's grandest home—a white pillared, sprawling, neo - Colonial, neo - Modern, monstrous Xanadu of a home. A home once owned by one of America's richest families, who only recently had put the suburban palace on the realtor's auction block.

But the home at 7 Fire Lane was obviously no longer for sale. There were lights burning brightly in the two dozen windows that faced the winding driveway. There was laughter and loud conversation behind the magnificent oak doors.

Ray walked slowly to the front door, and glanced at his watch before pushing the small yellow button on the side. It was ten minutes to midnight.

He rang the bell, and it echoed softly throughout the house.

The door opened. The man who answered was a stranger, faultlessly dressed in evening clothes, his black tie slightly askew, his face flushed as if with recent hilarity. He was round-faced and overweight, and he giggled as he said:

"Come on in, friend, come in. Party's just getting started . . ."

Ray stepped in after him.

At first, his impression was that it was a masquerade party straight out of Hell. The gigantic front room was alive with people, twisting and writhing with people, overstuffed with people. Their wildness of motion was only matched by the abandon of their clothing: violently-colored dresses, skirts, capes, shawls, headdresses, sashes; weirdly elaborate costumes without sense or significance. Some of the men wore evening dress, and some of the women were in formal gowns. But they were the outstanding exceptions; the rest of the assemblage were clothed explosively, in costumes inspired by wild whimsy or madness or both.

Ray gaped at the sight, and then caught the arm of a passing figure in splashy reds and yellows. The man giggled at his touch, and tried to get away, but Ray's grip tightened.

"Whose place is this?" he shouted. "Who's throwing this party?"

"*She* is!" the man shouted back with a laugh, as if he

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had told a great joke. Then he broke away, leaving Ray standing helpless and confused amid the crowd of revelers.

A slim young girl, her wrappings of transparent shawls the only covering for her lithe body, sidled up to him and threw long cool arms about his neck. A man pulled her away, slapping at the small, innocent face, a face only halfway out of childhood. A matronly woman, her features speaking dignity, and her mouth speaking obscenities, brushed by him. The party whirled insanely about him, providing its own unearthly music, a dance that had no rules. A bacchanalia of wild abandon.

"This is crazy—" Ray said, to no one, and started to back towards the door.

"Stop!"

There was a figure at the head of the stairway, a figure encased in the trappings of a priestess, a figure long and supple, but without a hint of angularity in the tall body. A figure with blonde hair cascading in a soft, unbroken wave to her shoulders. The figure of Leona Adams.

"The party's just beginning," she said softly, but commandingly, the orgy stilled by her entrance. "Let's not lose any guests."

They turned their heads to look at the lieutenant.

"Downstairs," she said, tossing back her hair.

The crowd cheered, and hands were moving Ray with the direction of the crowd, heading towards a stairway that led to the basement. He shouted something at Leona, but it went unheard in the uproar. Then he became silent, and allowed the fantastic assemblage to lead him below.

The sight that met his eyes as they descended the long curving staircase seemed like a medieval nightmare. The immense room that had once been a rich man's interior playground had been converted into an arena, a gigantic showplace ringed by dozens of plush chairs, with elaborate spotlights trained to play their electrical tricks throughout the center area. The crowd of revelers scurried for choice seats, battling each other for the privilege of getting the best view of whatever entertainment their host was providing. They seemed to ignore Ray now, so eager were they to take their places for the show, and he backed up the stairs again.

Then Leona came in.

"Ray," she said throatily.

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"How wonderful to see you again."

She extended her hand towards him, but he didn't take it. Instead, he stared at the beautiful face he loved, and saw that the eyes were the eyes of a stranger. There was a brilliance, a ferocity, an alien quality in Leona's eyes that told him the girl he loved was dead. This was a new Leona, a thing created by a monstrous force from space, a creature made by the jewel of Alpuria.

"Leona," he said, his face pained. "What's happened to you? What's all this about?"

She laughed. "My guests are impatient, Ray. Won't you join me downstairs?"

"You own this place?"

"Of course. I've always loved this house, ever since I was a child, when my father was alive. Those were better days for us, Ray, before our family lost its fortune. I'd promised myself to buy this house one day, and now I've done it. The jewel has done it for me."

"You sold it," Ray said, his voice choked. "You stole the jewel, and then you sold it. To Hofstra—"

"They're getting impatient, Ray. Won't you come with me?"

He looked down the stairway at the crowd, now seated around the great arena, clapping their hands and hooting derisively.

"Valens," Ray said. "What happened to Don Valens, Leona? Do you know? Did you send the letter?"

She laughed. "Yes, I sent it. I wanted to make sure I saw you again, Ray. I still want you, Ray . . ."

She touched him, and her hands were cold.

"Where is he?" the lieutenant said, backing away.

"Come with me—and find out."

She held out her hand again, and Ray took it.

He followed her down the stairs, to two vacant chairs at the far side of the arena. He sat beside her, his eye fixed on the door that opened darkly on the other side of the room.

"What's going to happen?" he said to her. "What's it all *for* Leona?"

She smiled, and stood up, raising her molded arms above her head to bring the crowd to silence.

"Members of the Immortals," she said, and the crowd applauded happily. "We who have been freed of the chains of enforced morality, and freed of the terror of death,

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we who have seen the Truth revealed in the depths of the gem. . . ."

Again, the crowd hooted and shouted in ugly enjoyment.

"We are here to celebrate!" Leona said. "We are here to glorify! And we are here to punish!"

Their cheers were louder than ever.

"What kind of game is this?" Ray said harshly. "What do you think you are, Leona?"

She looked at him with mingled amusement and contempt, and then turned back to the assemblage.

"My friends," she said, "we are here tonight to witness two great and significant events. One is the punishment of a man who sought to destroy the jewel of Truth, the jewel of Alpuria, the jewel of ecstasy—sought to destroy it because he himself could never know the jewel's blessing. Fortunately, we were able to prevent this catastrophe, and it is only proper that his punishment and execution be made public. Bring out the blind man!"

From the dark doorway on the other side of the room, a striking young woman in a brief costume emerged, and then another, bringing between them a hooded figure whose face wasn't visible to the crowd, a figure that moved slowly and uncertainly into the middle of the improvised arena.

"Valens," Ray whispered. "What have you done to him, Leona?"

"He's all right," she laughed. "But not for long."

Then Ray saw the whips in the hands of the woman, curling black thongs of tough leather.

"You can't do this!" He went to his feet.

"Don't be foolish, Ray. This crowd will tear you to pieces if you try to stop me." She put a cool hand on his cheek. "You won't mind so much, Ray, not in a little while. My friends!" She signalled to the crowd again. "Before we proceed with the punishment of the blind man, we have one more task to accomplish. There is one here who still lives in mortal ignorance, who still sees through eyes that have never met the radiance of the gem. We are going to change those eyes tonight—for the jewel of Alpuria is here!"

The crowd fell silent.

"Bring out the gem," Leona said.

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"No!" Ray turned his eyes away from the entrance of the arena, from the formally-attired figure that was emerging.

"Don't fight me," Leona whispered intensely. "Don't fight the jewel, Ray. You don't know how happy we can be . . ."

The figure was advancing towards the lieutenant, holding something carefully between his hands, a round object covered with a black velvet cloth. Ray watched in fascination, and recognized the small, delicate face of Lawrence Hofstra. There was a twisted smile on the jeweler's face, and even as he approached, Ray could hear the low giggle coming from his throat.

"Look, Ray!" Leona said hoarsely. "Look at the Truth!"

"No! I don't want to see your rotten Truth, Leona. I don't want your kind of immortality—"

"Look, Ray. You have no choice but to look . . ."

The lieutenant covered his eyes with his hands, and barely realized the swift and sudden event which happened before him. He heard the horrified scream of the crowd, and saw the blur of motion as Don Valens broke from his captors and threw himself at the small man in the center of the arena. There was a brief struggle, and Valens was holding the jewel in his hand, the magnificent gem flashing fire in the great room.

"Stop him!" Leona shrieked. "Stop him!" the crowd echoed. "Stop him, stop him!"

Valens was moving backwards, away from the terrified faces of the mob.

Then he lifted the jewel high.

"NO!" A hundred throats screamed the word.

"Kill him!" Leona cried.

A flash of metal glinted somewhere in the crowd, and then the metal streaked across the arena. The knife embedded itself deeply into the chest of the hooded man, buried almost to its hilt. Ray heard the blind man's gasp, and prayed that he would keep the strength to fulfill his purpose.

He did. His arms came whipping downwards, sending the jewel of Alpuria crashing to the hard floor.

There was no diamond-hardness in the strange gem. The blow smashed and splintered it like glass, sending ten thousand shards flying across the faces of the crowd, leaving a cloud of blue-white powder floating above the arena.

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Then Valens fell forward, and lay still.

The crowd was silent, hushed, fearful.

"What will it mean?" Leona whispered. "What will it mean to us?"

They were looking at each other, seeking the answer in their eyes.

Then Leona lifted her arms again.

"Nothing!" she said triumphantly. "Nothing! The jewel is no more—but we are the same. We are the immortals!"

They cheered wildly and danced out into the center of the arena, continuing the abandoned orgy that had begun on the upper floor, celebrating their release from death and the moral codes of men. From somewhere, music came, loud and savage.

Ray Collier left his seat, and pushed his way through the whirling mob to Don Valens' side.

He bent over the still figure, and with a great effort, withdrew the knife from its chest. Blood gushed forth, but no heart pumped it. Valens was dead.

"Ray!"

He heard Leona's voice behind him. She was holding out her lovely arms to him, her mouth laughing, her eyes shining. She was more beautiful than ever.

"Ray, don't be angry with me. I'm really the same, Ray. I still want you . . ."

"Want me? But do you still *love* me, Leona?"

She laughed. "Love is just a word. Come to me, Ray. Dance with me. I want to feel your arms around me again. I want you to hold me close to you . . ."

He stood up, as if in a dream, and moved towards her. She put her arms about him, and they moved into the wildly shifting crowd that was milling about the arena floor. He held her close, feeling the warm pulse in her body, sensing the familiar perfume of her skin.

"Ray, darling," she murmured. "We can be so happy . . . for as long as we can . . . if only you'd . . ."

"Yes, Leona," he said vaguely, and drove the knife into her side.

Her eyes stared at him.

"Ray," she said, the word half a question.

He didn't answer. He watched her face.

"Ray!" she screamed, and the crowd, suddenly stilled, parted to create a circle about them.

She slid from his arms.

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"I had to," he said. "I had to find out, Leona . . ."

She was still staring at him, shaking her head, not believing in the shock or the pain, or the realization of what was happening to her.

Then her eyes closed, and she rested, like a tired child, on the floor.

Ray bent over her, lifting her wrist.

He waited for a full minute, and then looked up at the frightened, inquiring faces around him.

"She's dead," he said flatly.

"Dead," their voices repeated, in whispers.

"No longer immortal now," Ray Collier said. "Thank God for that. None of you. None of you . . ."

He let himself cry over Leona Adams' body.

THE END

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF FANTASTIC published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1957.

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2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given.)

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

G. E. CARNEY,
Business Manager

[SEAL]

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of September, 1957.
VICTOR C. STABILE, Notary Public
(My commission expires March 30, 1959.)

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Mr. Fenbley's Nudes

By WILSON KANE

ILLUSTRATOR: NOVICK

There was nothing wrong with Mr. Fenbley's eyes; still he had a hard time separating the gals from the dummies.

"FENBLEY," called the floorwalker, a cadaverous gentleman with a large carnation. "Come here."

Fenbley came.

And he came promptly. At the age of 27, Arnold Fenbley was the oldest stock boy in Marcal's Department Store. He didn't want to stay a stock boy forever. He wanted to be a floorwalker someday, so he could wear a large carnation in his lapel just like Mr. Jasperson.

Then he'd make enough money to get a date with Sophie Eroic, a buxom girl in Men's Pajamas, whose hips spoke a universal language

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when she walked, but whose innocent face told you that what her hips were saying wasn't true at all.

"Yes, Mr. Jasperson," said Arnold Fenbley, eyeing the carnation.

"There's a mannikin in the storage room. Take it to the downtown branch. Hurry."

"Yes, sir." said Arnold.

He liked to go to the storage room because it gave him a chance to pass Sophie. Today she had chosen to wear a bright red blouse and tight gray skirt, thus insuring a substantial hike in sales in Men's Pajamas. Arnold slowed as he neared her.

"Hello, Sophie," he said. "What's doing?"

"Nothing for at least a week now," she said mysteriously, raising and lowering her eyebrows at him. She always was saying things like that and Arnold never quite could understand what she meant. But he always smiled agreeably as he did now and she smiled back. It helped round out his day.

He opened the storage room door and went inside. Against the corner was the figure of a female mannikin. Nude. It seemed to be a particularly shapely mannikin, not the usual kind with straight up and down lines with a curve here and there to distinguish it from a male mannikin. He looked around for something to wrap the mannikin in. It was 25 blocks to the downtown store. He couldn't carry her like this.

"Hurry up, Fenbley," said the stock man, "they're waiting for that downtown."

Arnold grasped the figure gingerly and then hoisted it over his shoulder. His left arm encircled her waist and his right arm held her in place by resting firmly on her upper thigh. Somehow she did not feel quite like the other mannikins he had transported to and from the front window. This felt warm and strangely . . . almost human.

He kicked open the door with his foot and went outside. As soon as he stepped outside three people turned his way and giggled. He knew it would be like this. Then, with measured stride and a stoney glare aimed straight ahead, he walked for the subway station.

"Let me know how you make out with her, buddy?" called a man on the corner. Arnold made out he hadn't heard, but he felt his ears get red at the laughter that followed.

Then he seemed to be los-

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ing his grip. The mannikin seemed to be trying to get away from him. If Arnold didn't know better, he would swear the mannikin was kicking her feet and digging her hands into his shoulders. He grunted and grabbed her more tightly and secured her position against the side of his head. But dammit, her feet were kicking. And she was grabbing his shoulders.

A face appeared right next to his. It was a pretty face. Smiling and blue-eyed, topped with blonde hair. She had wrapped herself around his neck like a snake and was pressing her lips against his ear.

"You've saved me," she whispered.

Arnold began to run, feeling the eyes of everyone on him.

"Don't run," she said, "you're hurting my stomach."

"Don't give a darn about your stomach," puffed Arnold.

"You will. I'm no ordinary mannikin," she said.

"I could tell that the moment I laid hands on you," he said out of the side of his mouth, trying to keep his composure.

"Do you know who manufactured me?" she asked.

"No and I don't care."

"My manufacturer said I was entitled to one fling as a human. When I met somebody whose body chemistry was just right I'd awake and become just like any other girl."

"It's a silly story and you're not like any other girl I've ever known."

"Well, if you want to believe that okay. But as long as I touch you I'm living and loving it. Don't think I'm going to kick away this chance by letting you go."

"Well I'm letting you go."

"Try it, honey boy. You're mine. You touched me awake as it were."

The back of his neck was warm as he felt her body against him. He raced toward a cab stand, his companion draped artfully around his neck and shoulders.

"Is this cab taken?" he asked.

"Get a hotel, buddy," the driver snarled. "Want me to lose my license?"

Panic grew inside Arnold as he felt the girl's arm twine around his neck as she rubbed her face against his.

"Boy," she said softly, "I owe you everything. And believe me, you'll collect."

"Stop hounding me," Arnold said to her. "Can't you see I've got a job to do. You've got to get downtown and right away."

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"Take me anywhere you want to," she replied. "Anywhere." He shuddered as he felt her lips tickle his ear.

He raced again toward the subway. He'd have to risk it. They needed this mannikin, or rather this make-believe mannikin downtown, and they were going to get it downtown.

As he neared the subway entrance a burly arm shot out in front of him.

"Who's your friend?" Arnold looked up and saw the face of a huge policeman. He wore the expression that many officers do who have patrolled the mid-town area for many years. One crackpot more or less wouldn't affect him at all.

"She's not my friend," said Arnold.

"Yes, I am," the girl said.

"She says she is your friend," said the officer.

"I never saw her before," protested Arnold.

"I never did either," the policeman said, "but I do see her now. And I do see too much of her. That's for sure. Now get her off the streets and into some place where it's more appropriate."

"I'm taking her downtown," Arnold said.

"Do that. Take her way downtown. But get her inside and get some clothes on her right away."

"I don't mind a bit, officer," the girl said.

"Frankly, ma'am, I sort of like it myself, but these other people here might not understand. So get your boy friend to buy you some clothes."

Arnold swung around and began walking as quickly as he could to the corner, which he rounded with considerable difficulty. He couldn't go any farther. He straightened up suddenly and forced her arms around him. She began to slide down his back and he started running. But she still had hold and kept a firm grip on the back of his pants as he began galloping away. Suddenly she gave a leap and was astride his back, like a cowboy on a runaway stallion.

"Will you get off?" he shouted frantically, as he stumbled and nearly bumped against an elderly gentleman who was staring at him with his mouth wide open.

"Hey, is this guy bothering you, miss?" The question came from a short man with wide shoulders who had planted his feet in front of Arnold and wouldn't let him pass.

"Not so's you'd notice it," she smiled.

"I think they're Siamese,"

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said a woman. "They're joined like that. Probably since birth."

"I'm not Siamese in the slightest," said Arnold, "and why don't you go home?"

"You're in no position to argue, young man," said the woman menacingly, advancing toward him, "I could kick you into oblivion right now, do you know that?"

"I am well aware of that fact, madam, but I cannot discuss it any longer. I am on urgent business."

"You said it," said the girl on his back. She leaned over and wrapped her arms tightly about his neck. "He just proposed to me," she said.

"I did not," Arnold protested.

"Well don't you think it's about time you did?" asked a righteous-looking woman.

Arnold let out a maddened shriek and galloped past her, knocking the short, tough man aside. He heard the shouts and calls as he ran toward the front door of Marcal's.

He bumped against the front door and his parcel was almost dislodged from his back. She had swung down and was sort of running along with him, holding on to his neck and trying to swing up on his back.

Arnold twisted and tried to break away. He heard the excited shriek of the shoppers, which started slowly but then broke into a frightful crescendo of feminine shouts and screams.

"I never saw this in Iowa," said a woman.

"I told you you'd like New York," said her friend.

Arnold stopped and squirmed but the girl wouldn't let go. She clung and tried to swing her legs around for a firmer hold. This time she succeeded, but was facing him from the front, wrapping herself around him tightly.

From somewhere Arnold's name was being called.

"Here," he called at the top of his lungs, as he bounced and twisted and bucked and tried to free himself from the tentacle-like limbs of the girl.

In a moment he was off his feet and on the floor rolling with his companion.

"Let me alone," he shouted.

"Not for a moment," she replied, laughing at him, as they rolled down the main aisle, like a big rubber ball that was not quite entirely round.

"I wish these young couples would do their bickering in private," said a woman customer who had dropped the earrings she was fingering to

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watch the moving mass of entwined legs and arms and bodies.

"And then people wonder why there's so much divorce going on," said her friend without taking her eyes from Arnold and his clinging companion.

"I think she should get custody of the children," said the other woman.

"There aren't any children," Arnold shouted, as he passed her way.

"You'd never know it to look at you," she returned.

"FENBLEY!"

The voice belonged to Jasperson.

"Here," shouted Arnold. "Down here. Come quick."

"Don't invite everybody," said the girl, who tightened her grip on him. "What kind of a girl do you think I am?"

Now the girl spun herself around and she had the upper hand, or rather the upper body, and Arnold was forced to fight her again to be in a position to call for help from Mr. Jasperson.

"Over here, Mr. Jasperson!" he yelled. "Counter 13."

Arnold looked at the ring of faces staring down at him and closed his eyes when he saw Sophie Eroic looking down at him, a faintly bemused expression on her face. Now she'd never even talk to him again.

"I'm here now, Fenbley, you fool," said Mr. Jasperson, bending down and grabbing one of the long bare arms that were attached to Arnold's neck. He pulled and Arnold felt the grip relax.

"They're fighting over the girl," said the woman from Iowa.

"Geographically, yes," said Arnold looking up, "emotionally no."

"Stop blabbering you idiot," said Mr. Jasperson, "this girl has every right to sue us right out of business."

"Mr. Jasperson . . ."

"It's no way to treat a customer," he said stiffly, as he forced his body between Arnold's and the girl's.

"She's not a customer," screamed Arnold, wrenching his arm free.

"That's right," said a woman, "he brought her in with him."

"They have names for men like you, Fenbley," said Mr. Jasperson, as he turned himself into a human wedge to pry the bodies apart. At last he succeeded and they snapped back and away from each other. "Get rid of her," Mr. Jasperson shouted.

Aronld leaped into action. He grabbed the mannikin

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which was lying sprawled on the floor and slung it over his shoulder as he had before. He raced down the aisle unmindful of the stares and laughter that followed him. He opened the storage room door and dumped the form on the floor. He brushed off his sleeves and looked bitterly down.

"I hope you're satisfied," he said angrily. But she didn't hear. She was lying limp, her arms flung outward. He bent over. She didn't move. He touched her leg. It wasn't warm. He remembered her words as he carried her down the street. He touched her again. It was the putty and plaster all mannikins are made of.

Mr. Jasperson swung open the door.

"That's it, Fenbley. Pick up your check. You're through. That's the last orgy you'll ever have on company time."

Arnold looked once more at the mannikin and went out. Now he'd never be a floorwalker with a big carnation.

Just outside the employees' dressing room later, Sophie was waiting for him. Sophie with her bright red blouse and tight gray skirt and innocent face and teasing lips. Arnold wasn't sure whether he should talk to her or apologize or what. But Sophie spoke first.

"That was solid, old tiger," she purred, leaning against him. "You for me."

"Me for you?" he replied.

"You know it. Pick me up at 6, front door. We'll get together and talk this thing over. That is, we'll talk for a while."

She turned and walked slowly away, her hips weaving a very descriptive pattern as she did so.

Then and there Arnold decided that there were other things in life just as important as being a floorwalker and wearing a carnation in your lapel.

THE END

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I MARRIED A MARTIAN

By E. K. JARVIS

ILLUSTRATOR: FINLAY

My TV set was coming up with the darnedest shows you ever saw. It seemed to have gone crazy—and I hoped it would stay that way.

WHEN the girl next door displays her charms for two hours on my TV set, while taking a bath, you can hardly blame me for not turning the dial to another channel.

The first hour of the show was just about as uninhibited as you can get. I hadn't watched ten minutes before I knew conclusively that she didn't know she was on TV.

After the bath, she exercised, and was a mighty pretty picture in pink and white when she finished.

Especially since my TV isn't a color set. It's just a plain black and white 27-inch screen.

When the show was over, the bedroom vanished and the commercial came on. I waited

No doubt about it—the girl

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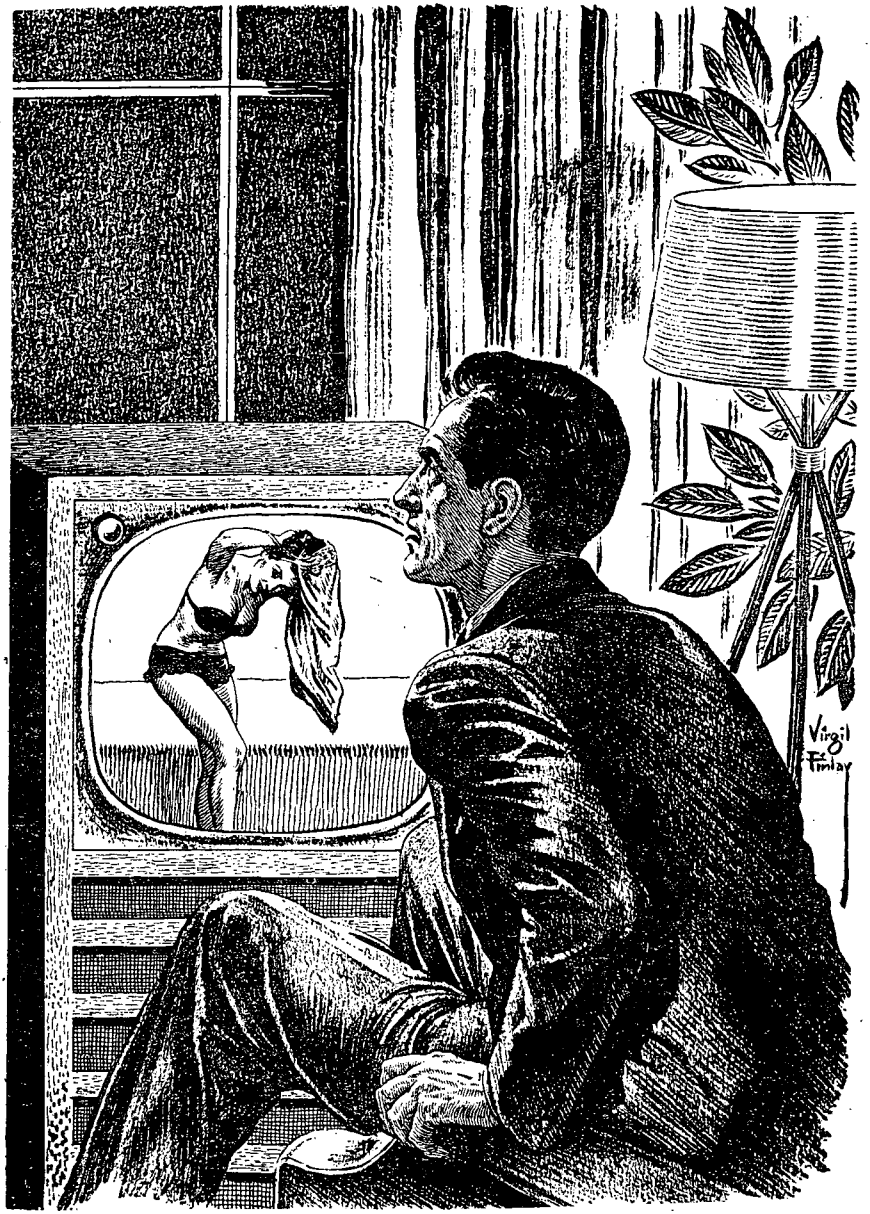

In the bathroom and the girl on the screen were one and the same.

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through all the recital of the marvels of secondhand cars better than new and costing practically nothing, hoping the cameras would return to the girl next door. But I was disappointed. The late-late show came next, circa 1929, and I flipped the switch.

I sat there a few minutes thinking. Obviously something strange had happened. My TV set wasn't functioning as it should normally be expected to function. In spite of that, I had no intentions of calling in a serviceman. Any serviceman would touch that set at his own peril. But just the same, I intended to find out just what had happened.

Being an amateur astronomer, I'm gifted with a bit more than ordinary curiosity. I've got an excellent observatory built on the roof of my house, with a seven-inch reflector that's good enough to separate the rings of Saturn and show up anything a thousand yards across on the Moon. Tonight, like almost all nights, I'd been using the telescope. I'd gone up to the observatory about nine to watch Comet Arend-Roland. I'd been doing so for three consecutive nights, ever since Arend-Roland had developed its sensational double tail.

I think I'd seen the double tail even before the big observatories spotted it and announced it to the public. One night it hadn't been there, the next it was knifing out toward the sun like a lance, straight as an arrow, and thin as a pencil. It was certainly the most peculiar double tail any comet in memory had ever sported. There is no record of a similar phenomenon among recorded comets. Quite a few comets have had double tails, some even three and four. But this one was different. The normal tail was like that of all well-behaved comets. But the thin "searchlight" that shot out of Arend-Roland's nose was just that, in appearance. It looked so much like a searchlight that you unconsciously changed your classification of the comet from a heavenly body to some sort of craft with a headlight and an exhaust trail.

But what kind of a searchlight could cast its beam for millions of miles through empty space? What refractive powers could possibly exist in space that would make its beam visible? No, of course it wasn't a searchlight. The astronomers explained it in the paper as being a "jet of vaporized material shot out from the body of the comet."

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They theorized that as the comet approached the sun, being composed of frozen gases and ice, explosions had occurred as the frozen mass vaporized, and one explosion had been of sufficient force to eject this stream of gases for millions of miles.

Being just an amateur astronomer, I can't really say, but I've looked at a lot of comets, and I just don't think they are chunks of ice. Anyway, tonight I'd watched Arend Roland until my neck got stiff, trying to figure out that headlight beam. Then, when the comet had gotten too near the horizon to observe very well, I'd come downstairs and decided to watch TV for a while before going to bed. At first I'd caught the tail end of *Gunsmoke;* but then the interference had begun.

You get so you can recognize types of interference—an airplane passing over, an electric appliance, a passing diesel, a distant station on the same channel beginning to synchronize its signal, the resulting "ghosts."

Well, this time there were interference patterns I'd never seen before. Little geometric figures of light that wandered over the screen, seeming to attack various portions of the picture, and obliterating it. And where the geometric figures had been, the picture remained obliterated. In the obliterated portions, "ghosts" began to appear, almost as though they were taking advantage of the vacant spots to put in an appearance.

I'd been just about to turn off the set in disgust when one of the "ghosts" resolved itself enough to become identifiable—identifiable as a well-rounded portion of the female anatomy. Startled, I watched to see if the rest of the "ghost" would come into focus, even though I felt certain that the intruding distant station's picture, when it actually became visible, would prove to be somewhat less spectacular than my initial glimpse had telegraphed to my mind. I was wrong.

The picture had come into full clarity all at once, and almost as instantly I had realized that it was no distant station that was coming in, because I recognized the face I was seeing, although the body was not quite so familiar because I was accustomed to seeing it fully clothed when I met it on the street outside my house every morning. There on my screen

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was the girl next door, very obviously in her bathroom, and just as obviously fully prepared to take her bath.

I've heard that TV color is excitingly good. I've never seen a color TV set, but one thing I am sure about, and that is the TV color set you can buy today can't even approach the color that appeared on my black and white set. Go outside on a summer day, and you won't see such vivid color. The contrast is something like a Kodachrome picture of that summer scene—always more vivid on your projection screen than your eye remembers it to have been in actuality.

Now, sitting there before my darkened set, I thought about that color, and I got the feeling that I'd seen a projected image that might be compared in essense to a Kodachrome projection. I knew I had been seeing the girl next door, but I doubted if the actual colors were as vivid as they appeared on my screen. I had the impression of *magnification;* not in size, but in *intensity.* This picture was intensely intense.

Suddenly I got it—this couldn't have been a picture from my TV tube, or it would have had that slight fuzzy appearance that is the result of the swiftly moving alternate lines of white and black that pass over the face of the tube from the "gun." Or, in this case, the alternate lines of color and black. The newer sets have finer lines in the picture, but still the lines are there. This picture of the girl next door had had no lines. The picture tube in my set had been emitting no electronic rays during the period I had been watching the girl next door, but the picture end of the tube had been picking something up just the same—something without the lines it would have *had* to have, if it had been an ordinary television broadcast. Something had been *picking up* the picture of the girl next door, and my set had merely acted as a reflecting screen as the picture was enroute to whatever was picking it up.

I got up and went to the telephone. I dialed three numbers before I got my number, then I said: "Madam, this is the Acme TV Survey. Were you tuned in on *Gunsmoke,* this evening? You were? And what was your impression of the ending? Did it end satisfactorily? It did? Three people killed. Oh, I see. And what program followed? *My Little Margie?* And did you

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see Margie taking a bath? You did not? I'm sorry, Madam, that's the wrong answer. Better luck next time."

I hung up and returned to my chair. Apparently other sets were receiving the regular programs while mine had become a super Peeping Tom. On sudden impulse I turned on the set again, then I turned it off. Some skinny woman in a coal-scuttle hat was doing the black bottom to the raucous cacophony of a ragtime band. In black and white. I sighed and headed for bed.

Standing beside my bed, I suddenly thought of the girl next door sitting before *her* TV set, and I hurriedly snapped out the light. Then I snapped it on again, and set the clock. I wasn't going to miss the girl next door when she went to work. There were a few questions I wanted to ask her. Also, I wanted to check the color of her eyes . . .

They checked out blue, just like the color of her bedspread. But it was she who asked the first question.

"Did you watch the comet last night?" she asked, as we waited for the bus together.

"The comet? And how! I mean, yes, I did."

"Does it really have two tails? I looked for the second tail last night just before I took my bath, but I didn't see it."

"Yes, I know," I said.

"What?" She looked blank.

"I know you didn't see the second tail," I explained.

"Why didn't I?"

"Because — because you looked at it too early. It was still dusk and it wouldn't show up—that early."

"How do you know I looked at it early?"

"You just said so."

"I did?"

"Yes. You said just before your bath."

"That doesn't explain how you knew it was early," she said in a puzzled tone. "I could have taken my bath at midnight."

"That would hardly give you time for your exer—"

"My what?"

"—cises," I sighed. The questioning wasn't going at all to my liking. First thing I knew, she'd be suspecting me of being a Peeping Tom. And I didn't want her to think that. I stumbled on: "Don't all girls exercise to keep their figures every night before going to bed?"

"No, they don't," she said. "But being a photographer's model, I have to."

"I guess that's how I knew," I ventured.

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"It must be," she said. "I *always* draw the blinds before I do my exercises."

I grinned at her. "Thereby forcing me to depend on my TV set for entertainment."

"Which is as it should be," she said tartly.

"By the way, what time are you going to do your exercises tonight?" I asked, injecting what I thought was just the proper note of humor into my voice.

She entered into the spirit of it immediately. "I'll be in full swing at ten o'clock, right after my bath," she said.

"Fine! I'll be at my TV set, tuned to channel Two."

She grimaced. "That'll be one of those old-time shows. You can have it!"

"It'll be an old-time show, all right," I agreed. "They're not so bad as you might think, sometimes."

I hoped I wouldn't be disappointed, because I had in mind a whole series of electronic tests I wanted to make.

"By the way," I said. "Why don't you come over to my place before you take your bath and I'll show you Arend-Roland's two tails through my telescope?"

"Oh, that would be exciting. I'd be more than interested. You know, comets have always fascinated me. Even as a little girl, when I first learned about the stars, I thought of comets as sort of street-cars in space, running from solar system to solar system. Keeping people waiting for centuries on corners."

"You're quite an astronomer," I said wonderingly.

"Astronomer? Me?"

"Sure. You don't believe they're made of ice either."

"And you don't believe they are street-cars!"

"This one's got a headlight," I said. "Just wait until tonight, and you'll see. More logically a street-car than a chunk of ice."

"I'll be there," she promised . . .

And she was. For two hours we watched the comet, and marveled at its two tails. Then we turned on the lights.

"I have a theory about comets," she confided.

"What sort of theory?"

"Well, I read a story somewhere years ago, where the author described comets as being 'trams'; I guess he was an English author, writing in *Punch,* perhaps. Anyway he solved the problem of carrying enough fuel to get from one solar system to another through interstellar space by having the spaceships 'hook a ride' on the comet which

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happened to be going their way—only he maintained it didn't happen that way, the comets were actually on schedules and on scheduled routes. Some ancient race had built them and set them on their appointed courses. The spaceships' crew merely latched onto the comet, then went into suspended animation while the comet took them where they wanted to go—our Sol System, for example—and then dropped off when in the vicinity of Earth. The comet even automatically computed their proper course as part of its service."

"You mean like this beam of light this comet has—pointing the way to 'take off' from the comet?"

"Yes. And do you know, there has been a rash of saucer sightings since this comet came into our system?"

"There have? I read the papers regularly, and I haven't seen any sudden 'rash' as you call it?"

"Oh, those things don't get into the papers any more. I belong to a flying saucer club, and we get all the reports from other clubs all over the world. It's a really wonderful system we have, and the general public doesn't know much about it. I think it's so exciting!"

"In what way?"

"Well, don't you feel that it's exciting to know we're being visited by super beings from outer space, out where . . ."

". . . where men are men," I finished for her.

"And where women love it!" she finished for me grinning impishly as she said it.

I stared at her. "Do you really mean you could go for one of these . . . these saucer guys? What makes you think they're so wonderful? Maybe they are bug-eyed monsters come to eat pretty little girls like you."

"They aren't. I know, because I'm, well, attuned, you might say. I . . . just . . . just have a feeling, that's all."

"Woman's intuition?"

"No, not that. It's more a 'sixth-sense,' or rather an elevated spiritual realization—"

"You're . . . er . . . attuned?" I asked.

She looked at me, and her face began to redden. "You're scoffing at me . . ."

"Not at all. I'm . . . well, to put it frankly, I'm a little piqued. Are we Earthmen so mediocre, by comparison?"

She looked at me. "No, of course not. As a matter of fact, you're quite nice." She hesitated. "Why don't you

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join our saucer club?" she asked.

"I'm in right now! As long as it doesn't interfere with my TV viewing during the late show."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a glance at her wristwatch. "I'd almost forgotten. You *do* want to watch Channel Two, and I *did* say I'd be taking my exercises by ten. Please forgive me for upsetting your evening this way. I'll try to be more thoughtful next time."

"You do that," I said. "And don't stint on your exercises—that figure is something you've got to take care of."

"Apparently!" she said. "It must be sadly in need of attention if it takes second place to a Vitaphone movie!"

"Don't worry about attention," I said. "It'll get plenty of that."

"From the saucer men?" she flashed.

"No," I grinned. "From me."

"Want to look at more comet tomorrow night?" she asked, considerably less ruffled.

"I'd like to have you come over," I said. "But maybe we don't need to spend the whole time at this eyepiece . . ."

"And maybe later on we can even cut in on the TV viewing time?"

"Maybe. If you can furnish a comparable entertainment."

"Don't you think I can?"

"Oh, I know you can, but the question is, *will* you?"

She didn't answer, but suddenly I hoped desperately she would. She liked me, that was obvious, but I was head over heels, suddenly. As good as TV (the colored kind) was, in the flesh she was so much more. More than I'd counted on.

I saw her to the door, then raced back to my TV set. I tuned in on Channel Two, and waited until the queer geometric interference began, then I settled back to wait in a tizzy of anticipation.

The interference came just as it had the night before, and in a moment I was watching the girl next door begin to disrobe. She didn't waste an hour in dallying around, this time, but went right into her bath and scrubbed industriously. Then she climbed out and picked up a towel.

That's when the new kind of interference began. I recognized it instantly. An airplane was overhead. But it must have been a rather strange type of airplane, be-

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cause the pattern was a bit different. More delicate and more complicated. I swore, because the interference was interfering with the picture. It got slightly blurred. Instead of going away in a few seconds, as an ordinary airplane interference should, it got stronger, and then stayed strong and constant, just as if the plane had hovered overhead.

"Must be a helicopter!" I exclaimed in irritation. "What's he doing hanging around here?"

Suddenly it hit me. Maybe here was the source of the real Peeping Tom who was responsible for the queer behavior of my TV set! Some new radar thing, maybe, that some air-force scientist had invented, and the pilots were using it to spy on girls in their bath!

"Why, the dirty . . ." I growled, and leaped over to the window and looked up.

In the dark I saw something, sure enough, but I wasn't prepared for what I saw. Hovering over the girl next door's house was an object that looked not at all like a helicopter, but most certainly like a flying saucer. It *was* a flying saucer!

It was about forty feet in diameter, shaped like two pie plates put together, top to top, and with a circling rim around it that glowed with a pale blue neon-like light. Atop it was a canopy or cowling made of some transparent material, and atop this, a blue light that kept pulsating in time with the interference pattern on my set. I glanced back at it, saw that the girl next door was just beginning her exercises.

When I looked back at the saucer, a pale orange glow was beginning to emanate from the base of it, and shone down on the house next door. It went right through the roof, it seemed, because the roof somehow became semi-transparent. Then I saw a dim figure floating down through the orange beam. It was the figure of a man. A saucer man! And suddenly desperate panic surged through me. I knew all at once that the girl next door had more than good reason to believe in her space visitors, but I had none of her faith that they'd be wonderful harmless guys. This fellow, I knew beyond all doubt, was intent on only one thing —kidnapping! He was after *my* girl!

I raced to my gun cabinet and grabbed a Luger that was

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my prize. I rammed an ammunition clip home into it, and ran like mad toward my front door.

Outside I looked up at the hovering saucer, just barely visible in its soft blue and orange light, and then tore toward the house next door. I stumbled up the steps, and reached for the front door knob. I turned it in a frenzy, and nothing happened. The door was locked.

In my mind's eye, I could see the saucer man grabbing the girl—clutching her lovely body in his ugly claws and drifting back up through the ceiling in his orange ray.

I went nuts. I fired two quick shots at the lock and slammed the door open as the lock fell into fragments. I raced for the bedroom, found the wrong room, then hit the right one. As I slammed open the door and careened into the room, I saw that I was right. The girl's bare legs were just disappearing up through the ceiling, and as I raced underneath, I leaped up and grabbed. I caught one ankle and hung on. And up I went.

I heard her cry out in pain, but I hung on grimly. A little pain from my weight on her leg would be nothing compared to being kidnapped into outer space by some monster! A second later I found myself inside the saucer, all in a heap with the girl sprawled across me, and beside us, two erect legs clad in shimmering plastic - appearing leggings and seamless trousers. I looked up, trying to get my gun hand out from under the girl's soft body without scratching her, and looked full into the eyes of . . . a very handsome man. Whatever he was, this saucer man wasn't bug-eyed.

I struggled to my feet as he stood unmoving, leveled my Luger at him and snarled: "Up with your hands, you kidnapping saucerian! Or I'll blow you clean back to the rings of Saturn!"

And all at once my gun hand went limp. My gun dropped to the floor, and I stood frozen. The saucer man had pressed something on his belt, and a pale green ray had enveloped me. I was helpless as a baby.

"You might at that," he said. "If I'd let you."

He smiled and the wind went out of my sails.

The girl was standing now, too, and she wasn't in the green ray. She stood there naked as the day she was born and didn't seem even to be aware of it. Instead she was

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staring at the saucer man with a very strange look in her eyes.

I thought I recognized the look. She was in some sort of trance!

My rage came back, and although I was physically helpless, I could still use my mouth. "You dirty devil," I raged. "You're not going to get away with this. You Peeping Tom of a kidnapper!"

His eyebrows lifted. "Peeping Tom?"

"Yes! Don't think I don't know you've been spying on this girl every night while she takes her bath and does her exercises!"

The girl turned toward me, suddenly startled. It was obvious she wasn't in any trance.

"Spying on my bath and exercises!" she said. "What do you mean?"

"I mean this *space man* . . ." I sneered the words, ". . . has been spying on you with some sort of super television—in color!"

"This is most interesting," murmured the space man. "How did you know that?"

"Yes," the girl repeated. "How *did* you know? And . . ." she turned to the space man, ". . . were you?"

He nodded. "Of course. We use our telerays to observe the people we wish to study, and many other instruments too. It is how we determine the spiritual values of those we wish to help."

"Spiritual values, my foot!" I snapped at him. "It isn't her spiritual values you're interested in, it's her body beautiful you've had your eye on!"

"And," he said rather drily, "I gather your eye has also been on her body beautiful, as you so aptly put it. But what I'd like to know is how?"

"I'll tell you how!" I raged at him, then suddenly stopped, as I felt my neck turning red. I turned and looked at the girl whose body beautiful was even more beautiful than it had appeared on my television screen.

"Go on," she said. "I think your answer will be as interesting to me as to him."

I decided to brazen it through. "It's not spying to watch your own television set. What do you expect me to do when you come in in full color taking your bath and doing your exercises in the privacy of my study—turn off the set and go look at a comet?"

She considered a moment, then nodded. "Of course I

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don't," she acknowledged. "If that's the way it happened, you were entirely justified."

She turned to the space man. "How did it happen?"

"One of those freak electronic things," he shrugged. "His set was attuned to my ray, and picked up what you might term an echo, or harmonic. Naturally it was in color, because my ray picks up the full spectrum, and even more. I've been studying you for some time, determining whether or not you were suitable to be my mate, and go back with me to my planet."

"And was I?" she asked intently.

"You were," he said. "Eminently suitable."

I gaped at him, then at her. "You going to take that lying down?" I gasped. "What a lot of nerve, coming here, picking out a wife, and then carting her off without her consent!"

"Without her consent?" he asked.

He looked straight at her, and his eyes seemed to bore into hers. She looked back with equal intensity, and then she smiled. "Of course not," she said. "I am your spiritual mate, and I will go wherever you go."

"Thank you," he said. "We never impose our will on anybody. I had hoped, and from my study of you was sure, that you'd agree to be my mate."

"You've got her hypnotized!" I shouted.

"Nonsense," she said. "If you'd been a student of flying saucers as I have, for these last ten years, and were attuned as I am to outer space, you'd know that any type of coercion is beyond the space people, and hypnosis would be coercion."

"I won't let you go with this guy," I said in despair. "I'm in love with you!"

She looked at me a moment, then slowly began a sort of undulating dance before me. I stared, popeyed.

"It's my body beautiful you're in love with," she said, halting her gyrations suddenly. "You see?"

I was groggy. "If you show me any more, I'll go out of my mind. You *can't* go off into space with a perfect stranger . . ."

"You're as much a stranger as he," she reminded me. "We've only known each other for about eighteen hours, and spent only two of those together, mostly watching the comet."

"Speaking of the comet,"

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said the space man, "we've got to be on our way, or we'll have to wait for the next one, and that'll be two months from now. But as for our friend here, I have been studying him, and I believe I can offer him something to look forward to. He is very receptive, and attractive, and I've just notified a certain fellow planetarian of mine of his existence. I am certain that she will study him in the near future, and if he should pass the tests . . . well, I can assure him that he will not lack for beauty."

"You mean . . . *me* marry a space woman?"

"All of us have certain vibratory qualities which make for perfect compatibility," he said. "Your people sometimes call it being 'soul mates'; but actually it is possible to have many such mates. It just depends on which one you contact first. I have an idea that my friend, who will arrive within the next few months, has much in common with you on the vibratory level."

I noticed that the green ray had gone out, and I moved a hand experimentatively. I wasn't helpless any more. But I didn't jump him as the inclination inspired me, instead I turned to the girl next door.

"Do you really want to go with him?"

She nodded.

"Okay," I said. "If your friend will show me the door, I'll be leaving. I'm not much for coercion either."

"You're nice," she said, and suddenly stepped up to me and kissed me long and friendly on the lips.

"Good-bye," she said. "And keep on tuning in to the late late show. I'm sure she'll come. I feel it, just like I felt that someday my own space man would come."

"I hope you're right," I said, starting to sink through the floor. "If you're not, I'm going to see an awful lot of corny movies!"

I didn't have to see too many. And by the way—if you're ever in my neighborhood, drop in for a meal. Man—can those Martian gals cook!

THE END

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A CODE FOR UNBELIEVERS

Here was a daring, new school of thought. It turned paupers into millionaires— and vice versa.

By G. L. VANDENBURG

ILLUSTRATOR: TANNER

IT WAS not an unusual day. Just another ordinary Monday.

New York went about its business as usual. Crowded, humid, noisy, belligerent, turbulent, indifferent . . . same old New York.

The Crown Building on Lexington near 43rd was dwarfed by two gigantic new aluminum neighbors on either side. Nothing different about that. Its white collar army, shuffling back and forth, in and out, up and down, furnished life blood to a complicated network of corridors and elevators.

Business as usual.

The Fitzgerald Agency was the same. Still on the thirty-third floor of the Crown Building. Still 396 feet up . . . or down, depending on your mental attitude. The account executives were the same. Nursing their ulcers, laughing on the outside, crying on the inside. Directors, casting personnel, illustrators, salesmen, accountants, secretaries, receptionists . . . all the same.

Business as usual.

Even Phil Staley . . . copy writer, six years experience, no promotions, seventy-five bucks a week, low man on the Fitzgerald Totem Pole Phil Staley . . . was the same. At least until noon. That was when Charlie Mathews strolled into the office. That was when it began.

For at that moment . . . in an office, in a building, on a street, in a city practicing sameness . . . Charlie Mathews was different!

With unaccustomed flourish he swept a chair to the side of Phil's desk, eased himself into it and leaned back. A stack of new accounts on Phil's desk provided a comfortable cushion for his feet.

"Phillip, my boy, I have made a decision. I am going to make a million dollars!"

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It was as if the building had sprung out of nowhere.

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Phil Staley opened his mouth to speak.

Charlie's hand sprang upward in a stop motion.

"Uh-uh! Let the genius continue, please. I am going to make one million cool, crisp, delectable dollars. And I am going to do it in one year! Three hundred and sixty-five short, ordinary twenty-four hour days. End of comment. Reaction, please."

Phil Staley's mouth stayed open. There wasn't much he could say right off the top of his head. This *was* Charlie Mathews, wasn't it? Fellow copy writer, six year man, no promotions, bored to death with his job Charlie Mathews? Obviously it was.

No, by God, it couldn't be. Charlie Mathews had performed the same monotonous, disgusting routine for six years. Quiet, unassuming, funny sometimes, but perennially apathetic. A man making a living, nothing else. No future. No plans. Nothing. Only this job that forced him to invent praise for everything from underarm deodorants to DDT, candy to caviar, soup to nuts. He hated it but had resigned himself to it. Prisoner of self-deprecation Charlie Mathews, worry wart, brooder, pessimist, tower of indifference . . . he just was *not* capable of making a million dollars, not even *saying* he was going to make it!

"I'm waiting for that reaction, old boy." Charlie clapped his hands in front of Phil's blank face. "Wake up, Phil. It's morning. Come on boy, look alive."

"I'm not in a trance," Phil barked.

"You could have fooled me, kid."

"Do you know you're two hours late?"

"Indeed I do, Phillip. Do *you* know I'm going to make a million bucks?"

"You said that before."

"I'll say it again. I'm going . . ."

"Never mind. What the hell did you drink over the week end?"

"Knowledge, Phillip, knowledge."

"What proof?"

Charlie frowned mischievously as he moved to his own desk. "Oh, I'm a little worried about you this morning, Phil . . ."

"*You're* worried about *me?*"

"I can see you have no intention of taking my announcement seriously." He sat on top of his own desk, relaxed against the wall and propped his feet up. "There-

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fore I will have to convin . . ."

"Charlie, get the hell off your desk, will you?" Phil's face wore an apprehensive expression. "The joint is crawling with vice presidents this morning. Suppose a squad of them walks by the door!"

"I'll tell them I'm going to make a million bucks."

"Oh, my God, will you come off that kick?" Phil moaned, rose from his desk and closed the door. He turned and caught Charlie grinning like a kid with a mouth full of jelly beans. He went back to his work-laden desk, exasperated. "Look, Charlie, we're up to our necks today. We can't afford to make waves, you know what I mean? How about forgetting that opium den you've been to and coming back to work, huh?"

"No can do, Phil. I'm going . . ."

"I know, you're going to make a million bucks. All right, for chrissake, congratulations!! Yuk, yuk! Joke over. Now I'll tell you one. Old man Fitzgerald . . . you know him, he's the guy who owns this agency . . . well, he brought the United Steel Account in this morning. And His Grace desires a complete booklet of institutionals before five o'clock. That's only about four days work we have to do in a matter of five hours. Isn't that a riot? Now let's put our degenerate heads together before we find ourselves walking a plank."

There was a cherubic delight about the way Charlie Mathews was enjoying his new self. He was a leprechaun and his desk was a velvet pedestal and he was perched on it with his knees folded up close to his chin and his hat sitting at a rakish angle with the brim turned up. His closed-mouth grin formed a wide letter U from ear to ear. There was no Fitzgerald Agency and there was no Crown Building. There was only he and his pedestal resting there three hundred and ninety-six feet straight up close to a cloud.

"Phil, you haven't asked me *how* I'm going to make the million."

"Charlie, the United Steel Account . . ."

"It's a foolproof way, old boy. You'd better listen. You're the only one I'm going to tell."

Phil regarded him with a solemn stare. "Charlie, do you mean to tell me this isn't a gag?"

"Of course it isn't a gag."

Phil lit up a cigarette and

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settled back in his chair. "What's come over you all of a sudden? I've never seen you like this. You came into the office with more energy than trapped lightning. You act like you have the world in your hip pocket."

"I have."

"It isn't in a flask, is it?"

"Nope."

"What's happened to you between Friday and today?"

"It isn't something that happened over a week end, just like that!" Charlie snapped his fingers for emphasis. "No, it's been taking place gradually over a six month period. That's why you haven't noticed it. But over the week end is when I decided I was ready to put it into practice."

Phil glanced at his watch. The apprehensive look returned. "Okay, shoot. But hurry it up. The sooner we get at that United Steel business the safer our alleged jobs will be."

"Ever hear of the Universal Subconscious Mind, Phil?"

Phil pursed his lips and frowned. "Can't say I have. But let's put it up for election and see if it gets any votes. What is it?"

"It's what's going to make me my million."

Phil flashed a patronizing smile. "You're in riddle-ville, Charlie. Young Phil is still in the dark."

"The Universal Subconscious Mind is everywhere. It's me. It's you. It's everyone. And everyone can use it. Every wish of every conscious mind in creation is the command of the Universal Subconscious Mind. It not only *can* but it *does* do everything the individual conscious mind orders it to do. It's the most powerful creative force in the Universe. And all you have to do . . ."

"Charlie."

"What?"

"Just tell me how you're going to make the million bucks."

"I don't know *how* I'm going to make it. I just am, that's all. I have faith in myself. I've made contact with this great creative force . . ."

Phil's fingers drummed the top of his desk. He closed his eyes and counted to ten in silence. His patience had been violated.

". . . you see, I went to this party one night about six months ago. And I ran into a man called Professor Gould. He's the one who sold me on the subject. You'll have to meet him, Phil . . ."

"Sure I will."

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"I talked with him through the whole party. He had me spellbound. He liked the way I listened and told me I had a very receptive mind. Then he told me he had a small school down in the Village and he offered to take me on as a student. I turned him down. You see, I wasn't aware of how many barriers I had placed in the Subconscious Mind all through my life."

"How many *what?*"

"Barriers . . . obstacles. Our whole lives are spent putting these barriers into the Subconscious Mind. For instance, as far back as I can remember—back to when I was about three years old—my father was always harping about money. *'The rich get rich and the poor get poorer.'* If the family went through a period of bad luck he'd say something like, *'It only happened because we're poor. It wouldn't happen to John D. Rockefeller.'* "

Phil lit a fresh cigarette. "So your old man was right. What's the point?"

"Yes, he was right, but not the way you think. It wouldn't have happened to Rockefeller because he didn't think like my father. I heard remarks like that all my life and the more I heard them, the more I believed them; the more barriers I placed in the Subconscious Mind. So when I grew up I was afraid of success. Not consciously, you understand. But over the years I had dumped enough negative thinking into the Subconscious Mind to create the belief that success was unattainable. And, since the Universal Subconscious Mind obeys every order of the conscious mind, sure enough success became unattainable! And I grew worse as I went along. I'd never be anything more than a lousy copy writer, I told myself. I wouldn't get promoted because either my luck was all bad or some clerk-typist would get there ahead of me. I wasn't good enough, nobody loved me, whoever did anything for *me*, too many people are smarter than I am, and a hundred other time-worn, petty excuses — barriers — have kept me from the greatest knowledge in the world—the source of my own being and the immensity of my own power! The recognition of myself."

Phil rose and walked to the closed door as though he was afraid somebody might have an ear tuned in. He turned to Charlie. "Kiddo, you've really gone off the deep end, haven't you? What the hell is this pro-

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fessor Gould character . . . a psychiatrist or something?"

Charlie jumped off his desk and guided Phil back to his seat. He had gotten up a full head of steam now and didn't want to stop. "Phil, I know you couldn't possibly begin to grasp my whole meaning in such a short time but just try to understand this: There is nothing that is impossible to the mind of man—as long as that mind is *free,* as long as it isn't cluttered with the thought barriers of ten thousand yesterdays. Because the conscious mind controls our Subconscious Mind and the Subconscious Mind is all-powerful! There is only one Subconscious Mind in the Universe."

His listener raised an eyebrow. "You mean I don't have one of my own . . . all to myself?"

"There is only *one!* You have it. I have it. It belongs to everyone."

"And my Subconscious Mind is the same one that's going to make you a million bucks?"

"That's right."

"You're nuttier than a tollhouse cookie!"

"Phil, listen to me. Every condition, every manifestation of your life can be changed according to your own conscious desires. I know that and I'm going to prove it. These barriers I spoke of are put in the Subconscious Mind through our own fears. Fear is our greatest enemy. But if we understand and accept the existence of the Universal Subconscious Mind, the great creative force through which we ourselves, by conscious edict, are capable of creating, then we can conquer our fears. By their very nature they are insidious, there is no valid reason for them. There is no reason why we cannot use our tremendous power to improve our lives, to create positive instead of negative."

"Thank you, Norman Vincent Peale. What say we get back to the United Steel account?"

"Phil, let me introduce you to Professor Gould. I know he could help you."

"I thought you said you turned down his offer to attend his school."

"I did, but a week later he called me. It seems that by being a good listener I impressed him as much as he did me. He offered to give me private instruction."

"Oh, I see. I begin to get the picture."

"I've been studying with

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him two nights a week for six months now. He's had me read about a dozen books on the subject . . ."

"All written by him, no doubt."

"He's made me a different man, Phil. I mean I'm ready to move. I can smell that million bucks."

"Charlie, just tell me one thing. These six months of instruction . . . did this professor guy by any chance charge you any money for it?"

"What the hell does money mean to me?"

"It used to be a matter of life and death."

"But that's what I've been trying to tell you. I always worried too much about money. It became such an obstacle that I could never achieve anything. But now, with all the things I've learned about myself, I'm going to channel my resources in the right direction. No more fear. No more worry. From now on nothing but results."

"How much did you pay him?"

"I don't know," Charlie shrugged. "About fifteen hundred."

"About all you had saved!"

"What difference does it make? I'm going to be a millionaire."

Phil slapped the desk with his palm. "Oh, brother! I have seen suckers in my time. A-number One, first class boobs! But you're a blue ribbon winner. You're living proof that P. T. Barnum was a prophet!"

Charlie was visibly stunned. He hadn't expected Phil's reaction to be so distastefully outspoken. "Phil, you're being pretty arbitrary about the whole thing, aren't you?"

"Arbitrary! Why the hell should I listen to you tell me how you got swindled by some Village character?" Phil shook his head and grunted. "I gave you more credit than that, Charlie. I should think you'd have had enough sense to stear clear of such an obvious phoney. The Universal Subconscious Mind. What a laugh! Did he tell you that was supposed to be God? Did he convince you that by believing all this crap you'd wind up with a reserved seat in Heaven?"

Phil's attitude was beginning to grate on Charlie. But he determined to let his new self keep command of the situation. Calmly. Forcefully. Resolutely. "Phil, look at that sign on the wall. It says *'Think.'* You remember I

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laughed like hell when I put it up. And other people get a kick out of it when they see it. But it isn't funny, Phil. And you know why? Because it's true! For as long as I can remember I've been nothing but a Thinker!"

"And what, may I ask, is a Thinker?"

"I hung that sign next to my desk because of a Barrier in the Subconscious . . ."

"Oh, my God!!"

"No, it's true, Phil!" Charlie insisted. "I had convinced the Subconscious, through my own fears, that I was incapable of *thinking* well enough to make any progress in my work. Of course the conscious mind would never admit to anything as abject as that, so it provided me with a face-saving device. Whenever I lapsed into a state of lethargy, whenever I goofed, I could always look at the sign and laugh . . . feel better . . . kid myself . . . reinforce the Barriers that were already growing by leaps and bounds."

"I know one thing, Charlie," Phil's tone was sober and firm. He looked his co-worker squarely in the eye. "You've thrown up a few of those damned barriers to all form of common sense and reason. I'd like to get it through to you that everything you've said adds up to one big crock-full of hogwash! You'll pardon me if I get sick."

"Let me take you to Professor Gould. I tell you, Phil, he can help you."

"Who the hell says I need help! I like me the way I am."

Charlie tossed his hands up in despair. "Okay, if you don't buy it there's nothing more I can say. I guess you won't be convinced until I actually have the money in the bank."

"I'm still curious about one thing, Rothchild." Now Phil's words dripped with sarcasm. "How does this fabulous million bucks manifest itself? Do you simply close your eyes and make a wish? And at the end of three hundred and sixty-five days your fairy godmother shows up with a small souvenir from Fort Knox? Or do five-dollar-bills just trickle in every ten minutes for a year?"

"I never said I was going to sit back and wait for the money. That's ridiculous. I'll have to work hard and plan for it. Now that I'm aware of my own capabilities the first step is to believe I'll make the money. And I *do* believe it, Phil!"

Phil laughed. "You've got

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to write one hell of a lot of copy to make a million dollars, Charlie. One hell of a lot of copy!"

The two men had had their share of arguments before this one. But always there had been the ultimate, though reluctant, capitulation by one of them. Never a stalemate like this. It was frustrating. The discussion straggled on but neither of them gave an inch.

Phil yelped when he looked at his watch again. It was two o'clock. There was just over two hours to prepare the United Steel booklet. The subject of Charlie Mathew's million dollars was quickly dispensed with. The two men went to work.

Tuesday followed Monday, same as always. New York had not changed. Neither had Lexington Avenue. The Crown Building resounded with its usual hum of activity. The Fitzgerald Agency, from the ulcerous hierarchy to the discontented lower echelon, busily maintained the status quo.

Phil Staley arrived at ten o'clock as usual.

And again it remained for Charlie Mathews to furnish the unorthodox.

"Fired!" Phil's face was incredulous with wrinkles. His wide open eyes were staring straight into those of old man Fitzgerald himself.

"That's right, Phil. Couldn't do the job. Don't know why I kept him this long. New man coming in. Be here in an hour." Fitzgerald, dressed from the pages of *Playboy,* suave, a perpetual smile on his lips, casually adjusted his boutonierre. "Henderson. One of our clerk-typists. Good man. Show him the ropes, Phil." He glanced around the office. "And while you're at it," he pointed to *Think,* "take down that stupid sign."

Fitzgerald left the office. Phil stared after him, then took a deep breath and tried to relax.

The advertising racket! What a rat race! Charlie gone. Fired. No apparent, valid reason! A new copy writer coming in. No experience, green as chlorophyl! And not a kind word from Fitzgerald about his own future! It didn't matter too much. Phil was thankful he didn't get the axe along with Charlie.

The United Steel account had a lot to do with it, he was sure of that. The booklet still wasn't completed. He'd have to start working overtime,

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arrive earlier, stay later. Anything to show the old man he was concerned, to show his appreciation for not being canned with his friend.

Poor Charlie! Not a dime to his name since that professor what's-his-name fleeced him. And now out of work and possessed only of some weird notion that he would make a million bucks. What a fool!

A few days later Phil tried to call Charlie at home. He was going to ask if there was anything he could do to lessen the blow. The telephone company informed him that Charlie's phone had been disconnected. Further investigation disclosed that Charlie no longer lived in the same apartment. And he had left no forwarding address. In a matter of days Phil stopped trying to find him. In a matter of weeks Charlie Mathews was a forgotten man.

The months passed with the speed of a cannon being pulled up Mount Everest. Phil finished the United Steel booklet. It was a good job. Fitzgerald gave him a pat on on the back and United Steel gave Fitzgerald the credit.

The breaks of the game, Phil told himself. There came more accounts, each from a different client, but all the same. Phil found himself snowed under. As his work improved he found it necessary to put in more time. It became imperative that he impress Fitzgerald so that the old man might see his way to a promotion, to relieving the drudgery of Phil Staley's life. But Fitzgerald was impossible to please.

The longer and harder he worked the more he yearned to do something else. And as his yearning piled up inside him, all semblance of ambition slowly deserted him and he found it easier to believe that anything . . . *but anything* . . . would be better than the work he was doing. Typing! Filing! Answering phones! Anything to obtain a final release from the writing of insidious, phony, sick, patronizing, dull copy!

One day his new co-writer presented him with a small sign as a gag. It read: *"Think . . . Or Thwim!"* Phil supplied the appropriate, called-for laughter and the sign was given a prominent place on his desk. But deep within himself he was aware of how rich and rewarding it might be if, out of the three hundred and sixty-five days in a year, a man could laugh more than once.

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To be free! This was Phil Staley's dream. To escape from the bondage of routine and become an independent spirit. To allow Time, the giant watchdog that had fallen asleep on him, to be once again vibrant and alive and have meaning.

It happened one year later, almost to the day that Charlie Mathews had been fired. It was lunch time. The Crown Building, vast reservoir of white collars, was emptying itself for an hour's respite.

Phil Staley . . . copy writer, *seven* years experience, *no* promotions, still low man on the Fitzgerald totem pole . . . was not hungry. Neither was he of a mind to sit out the hour at the agency.

He decided to go for a walk, something he hadn't done for five years. He paused at the entrance to the Crown Building, unsure of which way to go, but in a hurry lest someone from the office spot him and offer to share the lunch table.

Lexington Avenue was impossibly crowded. He walked as far as 45th, then swung west. He had no notion of just where he was walking to. He didn't care. It could have been White Plains, or Los Angeles or China. But it wouldn't be. And the knowledge that it wouldn't be brought on a kind of sadness in Phil Staley. He might walk ten blocks away from the agency, but no further. No point getting back late from lunch. Lots of copy to write.

Park Avenue was less congested. He seemed to remember it always had been. It was lined with trees and its buildings were large and formidable and clean. There wasn't one that was hard to look at. A bright, trim, aristocratic thoroughfare.

He reached 49th Street. There, on the southeast corner he encountered a blight on the landscape. Ground was being broken for a new building. The man-made canyon was a panorama of cranes, steam shovels, tractors, great tons of earth and bedded rock. Phil watched, disinterested, for a few minutes, then continued his stroll.

On the *north*east corner of 49th a new office skyscraper had just been completed. The last signs of workmen, fingerprints and chalk on the windows, sand in the crevices of the sidewalk and a few scattered tools, marred its otherwise bright façade. But soon it would shed these birthmarks and take its place in

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the overall picture. This was progress, something Phil Staley had always dreamed of but had never attained.

He discovered that the building had officially been opened that morning. A small booth had been erected outside the promenade of revolving doors. Two very pretty young ladies clad in skin-tight costumes were handing out souvenirs, miniature bottles of liquor, to every person who entered the building.

Phil accepted one of the tokens, smiled at the girls and drifted inside. The building was ultra modern in design. Sixteen tremendous marble pillars graced its spacious lobby. He stood just inside the revolving doors, staring in amazement at its opulent beauty.

Suddenly he was curious about the souvenir he had received. It was a bottle of champaigne. No doubt thousands of people would pass through these portals today, he thought. Pretty damned extravagant gesture, whoever was responsible for it. He noticed a fancy ribbon attached to the bottle. There was writing on it. He held the ribbon out straight and read the words: *"Welcome to the Mathews Building."*

The Mathews Building. Phil Staley frowned. His eyes came up slowly to view the great marble lobby once again. A quick glance back to the ribbon. He laughed. Impossible, he thought. Too fantastic to even contemplate.

And yet, for no fathomable reason, he found within himself an irresistible urge to make sure. Incredible as it was that a skyscraper could ever have been named after Charlie Mathews, he had to find out! Even if it meant making a fool of himself.

A quick check at the information desk told him that Mr. Mathews' office was on the 62nd floor. He found a crowded express elevator and announced his destination. The floors sped by and Phil began to feel uneasy. In the first place Charlie had only claimed he would make *one* million dollars. This building represented an outlay of at least twenty-five or thirty million!

Fortieth floor. The elevator was less crowded.

In the second place the planning and construction of the building must have taken at least a year. It would have been necessary for Charlie to come into a fortune within a week after he'd been fired. Not very likely.

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Fiftieth floor. There were only four passengers left, including himself. Probably all executives. How Phil Staley loathed executives!

In the third place he was being foolish even giving old Charlie the benefit of the doubt like this. He didn't believe that nonsense about the Universal Subconscious Mind and, by God, he wouldn't believe it now! That's all there was to it!

Sixtieth floor. Phil was alone now with the elevator operator. There was no time for further reflection. Only seconds passed before the operator opened the door again.

"Sixty-second floor, sir. Executive offices."

Phil took short, faltering steps. He was sure now that he was making a horrible mistake. The elevator door, closing with a bang behind him, jarred him.

A gorgeous brunette secretary, seated behind a plush, triangular desk, came to her feet and smiled.

"Welcome to the Mathews Building, sir. May I help you?"

"Oh, good aft . . . good afternoon . . . ah . . . I . . . ah . . ."

"Whom did you wish to see, sir?"

"Er . . . ah . . . Math . . . Charlie Mathews . . ."

"Whom shall I say is calling?"

Phil's face blossomed into an unabashed stare. "You mean . . . Mr. Mathews is . . . is *really Charlie* Mathews?"

"Yes, sir. Whom shall I say is calling?"

"Huh? Oh . . . ah . . . Phil . . . Phil Staley . . ." His words were barely intelligible.

The young lady picked up a phone. Phil didn't listen to what she said. He was too busy trying to convince himself that it had to be a different Charlie Mathews. He began to feel weaker.

Double doors opened. A man entered. A smiling, energetic, this side of thirty-five, young man with his hand outstretched.

"Phil Staley, you old son-of-a-gun! It's good to see you, boy! Come into the office and have a cigar. Did you get your souvenir down in front? Oh, yes, I see you did. My God, you don't look a day older!"

Charlie Mathews, dressed like a million, put his arm around his dazed friend and ushered him into a palatial office. He eased Phil into a soft, green leather armchair and stuck a box of expensive cigars in front of him.

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"I've been meaning to get in touch with you, Phil. Rekindle the old friendship and all that. But I've been pretty busy lately." He stopped long enough to see how Phil would react. But Phil was too busy gazing about at Wonderland. "What have you been up to, old boy? Still with Fitzgerald? Still batting out the old crumby copy?"

Phil nodded.

"That's a damn shame, Phil. The old geezer won't give you a promotion, huh?"

"Charlie . . ." he groped for adequate words, ". . . it's really something . . . all this . . . but how the hell did you swing the money?"

"Best question anybody's asked me all day. My first big break was getting fired from the Fitzgerald office."

"But you didn't have any money then . . . I mean . . ."

"That's right, I was broke. But I was also sick and tired of everything that meant work. So I said the hell with it and cashed in an insurance policy and went on a vacation. Went duck shooting out on the island. All alone. No one to bother me. No copy to write. No Fitzgerald ogling me. Second day out I ran into a guy who was having all kinds of bad luck . . . shooting ducks, that is. I struck up a conversation with him. Showed him a few tricks. Between the two of us we bagged twenty-one birds before the day was over. He seemed like a nice guy. I liked him. He liked me. We talked some more. Seems he had several big business interests and was on the lookout for a way to kill some of his taxes. After talking about it for a couple of days he asked me if he could use my name."

"What for?"

"Tax purposes. I'd be strictly a front man, you understand. He'd form a couple of new corporations in my name, invest, lose money for a couple of years until his tax situation became a little more palatable . . ."

"And you agreed?"

"Sure! Why not? He assured me there'd be plenty in it for me. Then he got the bright idea of having all his business interests centrally located. He decided to put up this building in my name. Have you given the place the once over yet? It's a real white elephant, you know. He'll drop a fortune on it the first four or five years. But that's the way he wants it, so why should I care?"

"You mean you don't own the building?"

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Charlie laughed. "That's a tough one, Phil. I don't really know. I've signed so damn many papers in the last year I don't know what's mine and what isn't. Except for the money. Every cent I make goes into the bank. I know *that's* mine."

"Charlie . . ." Phil swallowed hard . . .

"What is it, Phil?"

"One old friend to another . . . how much have you got?"

Charlie shrugged. "Well, I haven't checked at the bank the last couple of days. About a million and a half I guess."

Phil sank into his chair, the trance-like stare came over his face again. "My God, it worked!"

"What did you say?"

"You were right, Charlie! The million bucks! It worked!"

The millionaire frowned. "What worked?"

"The theory, the system, whatever it was you called it . . ." he couldn't understand why Charlie looked so puzzled. "You remember that argument we had about the Universal Subconscious Mind . . ."

"Oh, that!" Charlie laughed. "Yeah, I remember now. That sure was a lot of crap, wasn't it?"

"No, it wasn't! It worked!"

"What do you mean it worked? Are you crazy, Phil?"

Phil was out of his chair. "Charlie, you came into the office that day ready to set the world on fire. You had found new belief in a thing called the Universal Subconscious Mind and you were going to do wonders with it. You said you'd make a million dollars in one year. And you've done it! And I stood there and thought you were nuts. What an idiot *I* was! Why couldn't I have believed it then?"

"Phil, you have gone out of your ever loving mind. My million bucks had nothing to do with the Subconscious, Conscious or any other part of the mind."

"But it had to! One year and you're a millionaire! How else can you explain it?"

"*I* can explain it very simply. I was in the right place . . . at the right time . . . talking to the right man . . . on the right subject! That's all! There was nothing mysterious or ethereal about it. Pure coincidence and good luck! Nothing else."

"Charlie, how can you stand there and deny it? I remember the look on your face that day. You didn't have a trouble in the world. You had

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freed yourself and made contact with the infinite."

"Oh, Phil, really!"

"You got fired. It didn't phase you. It sure as hell would have bothered the *old* Charlie Mathews. But getting fired was part of your success because Subconsciously you *knew* you'd never make a million bucks working for Fitzgerald. In the first place you'd never have met this rich man."

"That's right. Like I said . . . coincidence! Look, you're the one who was right. I got taken in by some Village character. Cost me fifteen hundred bucks. All I had saved. I give the old guy credit. A great con man."

"What was his name, Charlie? Professor something or other, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, he *called* himself a professor. That's a funny one, isn't it?" Charlie laughed. "I'll bet he's worth a small fortune himself."

"What was his name!" Phil insisted.

"I don't know. Gray . . . Gassner . . . something like that . . . what the hell difference does it make?"

"The guy showed you how to make a million dollars and you can't even remember his name?"

"Come off it, Phil! Nobody showed me how to make a million dollars. The guy talked a great game. Universal Subconscious Mind! Only one in the Universe. It's mine. It's yours. It's everyone's! Baloney! One day opportunity knocked and I make a million bucks. That's all!"

Phil was furious. He grabbed Charlie by his shoulders. "I've got to find him, Charlie! I need him! Instead of listening to you when I should have, I allowed myself to fritter another year away. I don't want all my years to go that way. I'm in a rut, just like you were, can't you see that? Can't you see it, Charlie!! The Barriers are piled up a mile high and I need help!"

Charlie led his shaken friend back to the green armchair. "Sure, Phil, I understand. Now try to pull yourself together and relax. We'll have lunch together and have a long talk. I'll get you a good job in this organization if you like. In a couple of days you'll be able to thumb your nose at old man Fitzgerald. You'll forget all about that Subconscious Mind nonsense. And what the hell do you want to see that phony professor guy for? He'll only swindle you. You just put yourself in old Charlie's

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hands. I'll take good care of you. Okay?"

"Yuh . . . fine, Charlie. You're a real good friend. Thanks."

Professor Gould was slight of build, wore black horn-rimmed glasses and his face poked through a jet-black van Dyke beard.

He hurried from his kitchenette, through his studio, to acknowledge the insistent ringing of his bell. It was one o'clock, a rain soaked morning, and he had been expecting no visitors.

He opened the door and looked quizzically at his caller, a young man drenched from head to foot and obviously tired.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Pardon me, are you Professor Gould?"

"Yes."

"I've been trying to locate you for a week. My name is Phillip Staley. I'd like to talk with you. . . ."

THE END

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EARTH SPECIMEN

Being the diary of a man who learned, first-hand about some people from outerspace. They wanted to learn about him, too. And they were going to succeed—even if they had to use a butcher knife.

By GERALD VANCE

ILLUSTRATOR: SUMMERS

Entry—Sunday, September 29—

I BOUGHT this diary last December 31st to maintain a more conscientious account of my personal life, which I had been neglecting because of my duties as a teacher. I now note that the pages between January 1st and September 28th are blank. It would seem another excellent indication of what the road to Hell is paved with!

Now, however, there is ample time and reason to start keeping a record. I have reached a turning point. I have started a new life.

I arrived in Triangle this morning. It is a small town on the banks of the Kennebec River in Northern Maine. It appears to be a lumber town. There are two huge mills and the river is full of floating pulp wood.

The people (I've met only a dozen or so) are strangely complacent and reticent. They conduct their business with a razor-sharp awareness and a self-assurance that is close to chilling. The people seem naturally wary of any stranger.

Even so I am looking forward to my first day in school tomorrow. I must say it feels good to be away from Boston's metropolitan school system. It was always very disheartening being just another teacher among ninety-seven at the Bentley School. Never a sense of importance, of really belonging. Always the belief that if "old Bob Bellinger" were to "kick the bucket," as they say, nobody would ever miss him.

But here in Triangle I'm to be the head of the school system. It may be a tiny operation compared to any in Boston but that's so much the better as far as I'm concerned. (That sense of importance!) Besides, I would have

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The invaders had no time to wait for birth and growth.

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been a fool to turn down this job in view of the abnormal amount of money it offers.

Nine o'clock. Time to retire. I look forward to the new day.

R.B.

First Report: September 29:
To: Intelligence Commandant,
Point of Origin, #99odo89—Arcturus.
Subject: Earth Specimen:

Male human. Approximately thirty-five Earth years. Name, Robert Bellinger.

Acquisition of the subject was simple once a method was evolved. *Analysis-Base Triangle* made initial overture what is termed "registered mail." Subject's reply was negative. Acting on the suggestion of our operative Loda, who has done considerable research on the matter, a second overture was made in which our initial monetary offer was quadrupled. The speed of the subject's reply was astonishing.

Subject arrived on schedule this morning. Analysis will proceed tomorrow. He is tall, moderately well constructed, has fair complexion, even temper and seems content to be here.

The "School" he is to "teach" will consist of ten psychpenetrators, model ZBY-6742. Each Synthetic will penetrate a different avenue of the Subject's being. Findings will be immediately channeled to the Executive Council as per your orders.

End of Report From:
Rodor, Commandant
Analysis-Base Triangle

Entry—Monday, September 30—

The first day of school is over. I must say it has left me in a complete state of consternation. I grossly *over*-estimated the size of the school system. I had anticipated a minimum of seventy-five students. There are only ten!

I have no objection. But the number does cause me to again wonder why they are parting with such a generous salary. I would like to think it is because they could not find a better teacher anywhere, however, I'm aware of my own limitations, thank God. So I will stop wondering and be content with the easy life.

The students are the answer to a teacher's life-long dream. There are seven boys and three girls, ranging in age from twelve to eighteen. I have never had the privi-

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lege of working with such conscientious, such mentally adept children in my life. They are capable of grasping the most difficult subjects with the greatest of mental ease.

And they are not afraid to ask questions! One of the most annoying drawbacks with most school children is their continual inclination toward silliness whenever they have to ask a question. But not these Triangle students. They *want to know!*

And the area of their curiosity knows no boundaries. They ask serious, provocative, penetrating questions. Today most of their questions concerned me. Believing that mutual understanding is a prime prerequisite for good student-teacher relations, I answered their queries freely and forthrightly.

Before I forget it there is something about the students . . . *and* the townspeople . . . that puzzles me. It's the way they speak. Here I am in in Northern Maine and no one I've met has that familiar Down East twang. I particularly noticed it with the students today. They began most of their questions with "May I inquire of you, Mr. Bellinger . . ." or "I would like to ask you, Mr. Bellinger . . ." Now in the speech pattern that is common to all Maine Yankees the word "inquire" would have sounded like "inqui-ah" and my name would have sounded like "Bell-in-ja."

I don't suppose there is any law that says a group of people who live in Maine must speak with Maine accents. But it does seem strange.

Now that I have recorded these thoughts I am going to utilize the rest of this evening thinking about Rayn. And at the moment she is none of this diary's business.

R.B.

Second Report: September 30:
To: Intelligence Commandant,
Point of Origin, #99odo89—Arcturus.
Subject: Earth Specimen:

The first day of "school" was moderately successful. Subject's answers to questions followed a logical pattern with one exception. He seemed emotionally distraught when questions were posed by psychopenetrator Rayn.

According to all available data, unless the Subject was suspicious, this should not have happened! Orders were issued to send Rayn through

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Flaw Extinction Process. Findings were negative. Rayn was operating in "school" at maximum efficiency.

Therefore Subject cannot be suspicious.

That leaves the reason for Subject's reaction a mystery to us at this moment. Consequently tomorrow's program will be altered for the sake of a solution. Mass concentration upon the Subject will be temporarily abandoned. Only psychopenetrator Rayn will pose questions. The remaining nine models have been adjusted for Emotionalysis of the Subject. The third report will contain a comprehensive answer to this enigmatic side of the Subject.

Summarization of first day's questions will also be included in Third Report.

End of Report From:
Rodor, Commandant,
Analysis-Base Triangle

Entry—Tuesday, October 1st—

I find it impossible to stop thinking about Rayn! I cannot help mentioning her now, even though there might be unfortunate implications should her name be seen in my diary.

She is the most exquisitely beautiful creature I have ever seen. She has only to lift a finger, to speak, to close her eyes, to breathe and I am enraptured, elevated to a Utopia I never knew existed. Hers is the smile of the world and I want desperately to reach out and touch the sunlight on her lips.

I am being childishly romantic but I don't care. I have known this lovely girl for only two days and I am almost twice her age. But neither of these factors disturbs me because I am almost certain she shares my feelings!

Today something miraculous happened (at least I put it down as a minor miracle). Rayn was the only student who asked any questions!! The others just sat there! They paid due attention when I was speaking and they had comments to make concerning what I said. But not one of them displayed that admirable curiosity they had shown yesterday! It was almost as if these amazing students were aware of my inner feelings and had magnanimously banded together to play cupid.

I was very grateful to them, although I'm not at all sure of the accuracy of my answers to Rayn's questions. I was far too grateful, merely exchanging words with

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her, to pay much attention to the content of what she was saying. I hope I made some degree of sense.

I have never known love before. Neither have I ever known this surging, uplifting feeling I have experienced these two days. If love has at last entered my life I must, due to the age difference, etc., be careful to exercise extreme caution.

Good night, Rayn! Good night, good night . . .

R.B.

Third Report: October 1:
To: Intelligence Commandant, Point of Origin, #99odo89—Arcturus.
Subject: Earth Specimen:

Second "school" day proved interesting if not completely fruitful. Psychopenetrator Rayn posed questions while other nine models conducted Emotionalysis of Subject for second consecutive day.

It is now apparent that our error at the initial session was assigning Psychopenetrator Rog to record the Sexual Impulse phase of the Subject's being. The Model Rog is constructed on a parallel with a male human. Today's session disclosed that the Sexual Impulse phase can be completed only when the probing is being recorded through a female model such as Rayn.

However, in spite of these new facts, the Subject experienced increased emotional disturbances while conversing with Rayn! It is certain that he is sexually attracted to her but that fails to account for why he is so emotionally distraught. Something is happening inside the Subject that has so far managed to elude our most advanced methods of mental and physical infiltration. We will continue to work diligently to discover what it is.

In the meantime, for your immediate disposal, here is the summary of the first day, nine Psychopenetrators (Model ZBY6742) reporting ninety-one percent accurate results (Rayn, of course, being excluded).

Physiology — Subject's replies proved that efforts to obtain *average* human specimen had been successful. Overall health is good. Age expectancy of seventy Earth years does not compare favorably with our own one hundred - twenty - five. However, our Spectrans Statisticians hold that colonization would be feasible through an efficiently controlled system of mass reproduction.

Physical Stamina—.002-:-

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3:1—this figure, according to Psychopenetrators, would not vary more than :1 to :4 if every member of the species was tested. No deterrent to colonization.

Mental Aptitude—By Arcturus standards, backward. By Earth standards, above average. By Subject's standards, bordering on genius. No deterrent.

Mental Stamina — Subject is harassed by anxieties, mostly of an infantile nature. Examples: darkness, high altitudes, unrestricted power, the unknown and certain four-legged mammals. The mere sight of an unarmed Galaxy Cargo Vessel might easily cause him to panic. Surprise armed invasion might defeat colonization plan.

Intellect—Negligible. Warfare on this basis would result in early disintegration of brain tissue. Inadvisable.

Religion — Backward. The time-worn one God theory. Known variously as The Almighty. The Supreme Being, The King of Kings, The Absolute, The Creator of All Things, The Infinite, The Eternal, etc. Most prevelant flaw; Subject envisions God in his own image!

Culture — Backward. Thwarted for the most part by Religion. Creativity, formation of new ideas, thought patterns, accomplished by a fraction of species mostly isolated from dogmatic doctrine of religion.

Sexual Impulses—As noted, findings incomplete at this time.

Resistance—From point of view of the Subject (and therefore of the species)—formidable. On the basis of information thus far obtained negligible.

Further tests are being temporarily halted until Subject's mysterious emotional disturbances are accounted for. Orders have been issued to have Rayn stripped of Standard Functional Waves. She will be equipped with Decepto-Ray Unit ZBY6742.o8 (Magnitude .0032:5:7) and will be granted limited freedom. The other models must remain in school, on a non-functional basis, in order that the Subject not become suspicious.

End of Third Report
From:
Rodor, Commandant,
Analysis-Base Triangle

Entry—Wednesday, October 2—

I *must* be careful! I know now that I am deeply in love

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with Rayn! I experienced this confirmation the moment she first looked at me in class this morning. It was a strange, ethereal sensation. There was a warm, enveloping softness in her eyes that seemed to speak to me and say, "yes, Robert, you are mine and I am yours . . . eternally. Love me, Robert. Love me!" She continued to stare at me, adoringly, from her seat. I was her Apollo, standing majestically on Mount Olympus, poised for direct flight into her arms!

I forced myself to look away from her. There were the other students to think about. There was no telling which of them might be prone to telling tales out of school.

I was utterly shocked to discover that I had been looking at Rayn for over an hour! How could this be! I must be *sick* with love, I told myself. It was understandable enough to gaze upon perfect beauty for an hour but to do it to the complete neglect of the other students! How stupid could I be?

My shock was compounded when I discovered that the students were paying no attention. Every last one of them was busy writing in their notebooks, behaving as though Rayn and I did not exist. I was certain this was probably a discretionary move on their part so I questioned several of them. It seems incredible but I am positive they noticed nothing out of the ordinary!

What a curiously complex group of children!

But still I must be careful! I know I am in love with her . . . hopelessly, for all time. And I know she loves me. But the classroom must not be a scene of consummation. I must find a way to see her alone, to talk with her . . . finish later, someone knocking at door . . .

R.B.

Fourth Report: October 2:
To: Intelligence Commandant,
Point of Origin, #99odo89—Arcturus.
Subject: Earth Specimen:

Third "school" day produced only partial results. Subject's emotional disturbances remain, for all practical purposes, incomprehensible.

Psychopenetrator Rayn performed with maximum efficiency in exercising Magnowave control over nine other models who were merely in attendance on Non-Functional basis. Subject suspected nothing.

For further concentrated

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probing of the Subject Rayn was equipped with Decepto-Ray Unit (Adjusted to maximum power, a minor deviation from original plan).

We regret to report that Decepto-Ray Unit failed to achieve better than ten percent effectiveness. Subject was placed in a state of Illusion for one hour. But gradually he built up a resistance and was finally able to extricate himself. Herewith, the results of that hour:

Subject fell under Rayn's spell. She immediately utilized Decepto-Ray Unit at maximum power. Subject entered state of Illusion, responded satisfactorily. However, this lasted only a few moments before resistance set in. Rayn's Emotionalysis Graph, as with all such graphs, records only *individual* horizontal lines. After "school" when the graph was studied it was a labyrinth of connected vertical, horizontal, diagonal and curved lines! Whatever these emotional disturbances they are capable of upsetting not only our instruments but the subject himself. Subject's heart beat soars to an astonishing speed—fast enough to cancel even the strongest of our race! His nervous system and blood stream behave in a quivering, frenzied manner. His mind seems to be in a swirling state. Any clear thoughts he may be having he gets from us.

Ordinarily these reactions might be attributed to the subject's fears. But we have discounted that theory for obvious reasons. The "schoolroom" is not dark. It is in a one-storey building and there have been no four-legged mammals present. The Subject has no knowledge that he is in the presence of the Unknown and of unrestricted Power.

Another plan has been devised. On the theory that the Subject strongly desires Rayn sexually, it is possible he wishes to be alone with her. The presence of nine other "students" in the "schoolroom" naturally presents an obstacle. Possibly a fear of being discovered by the other students was the reason for his invulnerability to Decepto-Ray. It would be unwise to remove "students" from "school." Therefore it has been decided to allow Rayn to visit Subject's quarters.

Results of this plan will be relayed to you with the utmost dispatch.

End of Fourth Report
From:
Rodor, Commandant,
Analysis-Base Triangle

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Entry—Thursday, October 3—

It is morning. Seven o'clock. School has not yet begun. For the first time I don't really look forward to it. I have not slept. But I have seen her alone! Here in my quarters last night. As if final proof of her love were needed she chose to visit me, uninvited, to offer that proof.

Three glorious hours together . . . laughing, talking, adoring each other . . . every moment golden, precious . . . resenting only Time, the silent chaperone that would perform its inevitable duty and pull us apart . . . until a new dawn approached and brought us together again, another day with her.

At two o'clock she had to leave. I walked with her to the door. She put her arms around me. Her face was close to mine and she closed her eyes. Her mouth . . . warm and moist, gently pampered my cheeks, my ears, my neck. Her lips opened and blended with mine . . . and her kiss continued for a million radiant years . . . until she took leave of my arms . . . infinite sorrow . . . but only for a few fleeting hours.

I must leave for school now . . . for Rayn . . . my darling . . . my love . . . sweet love . . . everlasting love. . . .

R.B.

Fifth Report: October 3:
To: Intelligence Commandant,
Point of Origin, #99odo89—Arcturus.
Subject: Earth Specimen:

In the privacy of Subject's quarters Psychopenetrator Rayn's Decepto-Ray Unit was able to determine the reason for the emotional disturbances. The Subject is "in love" with Rayn. According to our most advanced analytical instruments this does not indicate that the Subject is motivated solely by physical desire. It merely confirms our earlier suspicions about the Sexual Impulse phase and solves the *reason* for the disturbances.

Hence the mystery remains. We still do not know what *causes* the disturbances, nor do we know from which part of the Subject they emanate. Consequently they cannot be categorized at this time.

The Decepto-Ray, once it has transferred a Subject into a world of illusion, has always been one hundred percent effective. Yet this Subject has succeeded in rendering it less than fifty percent

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effective, apparently with the aid of this something called "love."

If this "love" is a manifestation of mental power we are not aware of its potentiality at this time.

You are strongly urged to contact the Executive Council and recommend that the plan for colonization be suspended until "love" can be broken down and examined.

We are abandoning all tests of the Subject at "school." Rayn will be given more time alone with the Subject.

End of Fifth Report
From:
Rodor, Commandant,
Analysis-Base Triangle

Entry—Thursday, October 3 (Continued)—

Classes proceeded smoothly. Rayn and I decided last night to be extra careful about paying too much attention to each other. The students were quiet, attentive, conscientious as always.

I am waiting for her now. I try to hasten the seconds until I can look upon her loveliness framed in my doorway —but Time, the militant patriarch, grants no favors.

There are many problems to be settled tonight. And I want to settle *all* of them! Then we can be together—united—no outside pressure, no parents to worry about, no fear of being the subject of whispers—just the two of us —with each other always— Hurry, Rayn—hurry, hurry!

R.B.

Entry—Friday, October 4—

Morning has been upon us for an hour—but day has not yet come alive.

Now golden sunshine melts on my darling's lips . . . glistens through her velvet brown hair . . . tender, sleep-filled eyes . . . half opened now . . . reflecting pools of love . . . filled with the wonder of life . . . a smile . . . the room is brighter, gayer . . . it lives! Rayn is awake!

She has gone to "school." I must also leave soon but these reflections are vitally important!

Am I a fool to have allowed last night to happen? I don't know. What frightens me is that I don't care. She *is* an exotic creature! No other like her exists in the universe. I know that as surely as I know I love her!

We settled none of the problems last night. If anything we compounded them. There was no hurry, she said, to discuss anything with her

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parents. When the time comes they will fully understand. And the way she said it made me believe it. How could the two people who bore this gift of God fail to understand, I asked myself.

According to the "school" records she is only eighteen. But records are merely statistics. And statistics are hard, indifferent, impervious facts on a piece of paper. Once, after a summer rain, I was mesmerized by the beauty of a rainbow rising out of Lake Whalom and arcing itself across the mid-afternoon sky. I did not need the available statistics on rainbows in order to appreciate it. The same is true of Rayn. She is worldly, vibrant, she is from yesterday, from a classic mold.

It seemed strange for a time that she never mentioned love, never said "I love you." But it is no longer strange. Love is all around her. Her eyes whisper love, her touch manifests it, her kiss ignites it.

The ecstasy of last night was like nothing I have ever experienced. With the limited powers of my own imagination it is difficult to recapture. She brushed her cheek against mine . . . and her kiss found my eager mouth . . . and the sensation . . . was instantaneous, rhapsodic . . . a symphony of strings swept all other sound out of existence . . . I saw Rayn . . . my wife . . . there was a farm . . . shaded, protected by the waving branches of giant, languid elms . . . there was the clear, fresh smell of new mown hay . . . together on *our* farm . . . Rayn framed against the horizon . . . her hair, velvet-soft, resisting the violent wind of New England's October . . . the day's chores completed . . . the haze of dusk . . . then running, running over a breathtaking stretch of open field . . . running and laughing . . . falling to the rich earth that we both cherished and was ours . . . making love under the open sky . . . unashamed . . . deeper, deeper into the abyss of love . . . Rayn and me . . . forever. . . .

I did not dream these things. It was not my imagination. I saw and heard and felt them. I was there! Experiencing the fulfillment of love. This is the cycle come full for the first time! Contentment, created at birth, abused in adolescence, lost in puberty, craved and sought after in adulthood and rediscovered with love and understanding. This I believe. And Rayn believes it too!

R.B.

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Sixth Report: October 4:
To: Intelligence Commandant,
Point of Origin, #99odo89—Arcturus.
Subject: Earth Specimen:

Urgent this report reach Executive Council immediately!

A grave emergency has arisen! Psychopenetrator Rayn is "in love" with the Subject! This turn of events has our technicians and instruments in a state of utter confusion.

It is beyond the realm of possibility for a Psychopenetrator to break down. Yet it has happened! Rayn returned from Subject's quarters this morning talking incoherently about the magic of "love." At first we thought that her mission had been one hundred percent successful. However, as she continued to rave about "love" and resist all questions put to her, we soon recognized that something was drastically wrong. The technical staff went to work.

In a matter of minutes they issued the remarkable statement that Rayn's Decepto-Ray Unit had been inverted. Yes, *in*verted!! The Decepto-Ray had succeeded in transporting the Subject into a beautiful world of Illusion and then, contrary to its own technical perfection, had transported Rayn into that world *with* the Subject! It thereby inverted itself and was able to supply us with no information other than the content of the Subject's and Rayn's illusions. That of course was of no value whatever.

We then decided that if Rayn had truly been instilled with this "love" that we should be able to locate it. Rayn was taken apart, probed, checked, re-checked, every component tested and analyzed. We found nothing!

It was logical to assume, though, that when re-assembly was completed she would be back to normal. We received another shock. She was reassembled and asked her name. Her reply: "I am Rayn and I am in love with Robert."

Incredible is the only way we can describe today's events. Rayn is being isolated from the "classroom." We are doing this for two reasons. In order to keep her under constant pressure of interrogation. And isolation from the Subject may prompt his "love" to manifest itself in some form that we are prepared to deal with.

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Reports will be dispatched simultaneously with new results.

End of Sixth Report
From:
Rodor, Commandant,
Analysis-Base Triangle

Entry—Friday, October 4
(Continued)—

She didn't come to "school" today! I can't figure out why. She left my quarters one hour before "school" was due to start. She can't have gotten ill in an hour!

I think I'm developing a guilt complex. I'm still certain the other students do not know about us. And yet I didn't dare ask any of them if they had seen her for fear that an answer might be accompanied by a sly and knowing grin. I continued to grow uneasy.

I'm sure she's all right. I pray she is. More than likely I'm worrying over nothing. She'll come to my quarters tonight and explain her absence. I'll tell her how I worried and how many illnesses I imagined and we'll both have a good laugh.

R.B.

. . . maybe I should phone her to make sure she . . . no . . . not a very wise idea. . . .

R.B.

Seventh Report: October 4:
To: Intelligence Commandant,
Point of Origin, #99odo89—
Arcturus.
Subject: Earth Specimen:

Interrogation of Rayn continues. She seems no longer capable of making any sense whatever. It was learned that Subject keeps a log of daily events. This log was obtained, while Subject was in "school," by our operative Loda and put through Optoscope for immediate scrutiny.

It is a childish book containing very little logic. On the chance that it may have been in code the log then underwent a Unicipher Examination. It contained even less logic. There are myriad references to "love" which still remains a mystery.

Interrogation of Rayn will now be simultaneous with a concentrated drive by our research analysis to solve "love" —if not the cause of it, at least the meaning. We are confident of success.

End of Seventh Report
From:
Rodor, Commandant,
Analysis-Base Triangle

Entry—Saturday, October 5:

Something dreadful must have happened! She was due

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here at ten o'clock last night. It is now three in the morning and no word from her.

I have a dull ache in the pit of my stomach. We have been found out, I'm sure of it! Somehow her parents have learned. . . .

I mustn't think this way! What if they do know? We've done nothing to be ashamed of! I'll tell them that . . . of course! The only right thing to do is to see her parents and explain to them how I feel . . . tell them my intentions are highly honorable and then prove it by asking her to marry me. . . .

I wish she would call first . . . it would help to know exactly what frame of mind her family is in . . . that ache in my stomach refuses to go . . .

Maybe she'll show up after all . . . I don't know . . . I don't know . . . I pray. . . .

R.B.

Eighth Report: October 5:
To: Intelligence Commandant, Point of Origin, #99odo89: Arcturus.
Subject: Earth Specimen:

For Executive Council—Urgent!

At approximately ten o'clock (2:70 Arcturus Time) last night, after cooperating with interrogation for twelve hours, Psychopenetrator Rayn began to cause trouble. She arbitrarily insisted that the interrogation was over and that she be allowed to leave.

When permission was refused she became violent. Three other Synthetics were summoned to physically subdue her. She was then placed under close guard.

At approximately four o'clock (1:20 A.T.) Psychopenetrator Rayn escaped! The door to her cell had been demolished. The three Synthetics that had stood guard were in prone positions on the floor. Each had somehow been demagnetized and thus rendered totally helpless.

Shortly after the escape it was learned that a Decepto-Ray Unit was missing!

These actions are, of course, unprecedented. Until now the idea of a Synthetic capable of formulating its own thoughts was inconceivable. But it has happened and there can no longer be any doubt that the power of this enigma called "love" must be formidable indeed.

All of our advanced instruments have failed. Our research analysts have labored tirelessly over hundreds of volumes to at least find a definition. Their findings to date

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are utterly illogical. "Love" is all-meaning, but indefinable! We know that logically this is impossible!

But in lieu of the immense difficulty we have encountered we feel there is but one avenue of approach left open to us. We request that Executive Council rescind Section Fourteen of the Orders of Analysis-Base Triangle. True, this is a last resort measure, but what other choice do we have? Neither this mission, nor any plan for colonization, can be successful if this planet is able to hold the balance of power with a weapon of which we have no knowledge and therefore no way of combatting.

Time is of the essence. Await your reply.

End of Eighth Report
From:
Rodor, Commandant,
Analysis-Base Triangle

Entry—Saturday, October 5:—(Continued)—

I prayed . . . and I asked God to hold back the dawn until my love was beside me again. The sun bursts through my window now . . . and Rayn sleeps.

But I am still apprehensive. She was tired when she came to me . . . and afraid. I wanted to know about her family . . . and if they had caused her delay . . . but she would talk only of being deeply in love and of wanting to race away with me to another world. I wanted desperately to ask more questions, to find out what she was so frightened of . . . but she kissed me and I was helpless.

Her kiss lingered . . . until we found ourselves next to the earth in the open field . . . in that other world that was ours . . . clearer and more beautiful than it was before . . . and as love swept through us it became a reality . . . to touch . . . to smell . . . to hold precious and close . . . to never take leave of . . . years passed—decades . . . and we were always young . . . October was always with us . . . the flowers never faded . . . the trees did not shed their summer leaves . . . for winter never came to us . . . and the face of heaven never wept. . . .

Now she sleeps.

I am thankful to God for returning her to me. There are no obstacles ahead of us now. There is no power on earth that can keep us apart.

Tomorrow I will talk to her and she will feel more like making plans.

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Ninth Report: October 5:
To: Intelligence Commandant,
Point of Origin: #99odo89—Arcturus.
Subject: Earth Specimen:

We acknowledge and are grateful for the retraction of Section Fourteen of our orders.

Four Shock-Robots were dispatched to the Subject's quarters. At eight o'clock (2:40 A.T.) this morning Rayn and the Subject became our prisoners. As we suspected Rayn was found to be in possession of the stolen Decepto-Ray Unit. This Unit was inverted, this time to such a degree that it is beyond repair.

Psychopenetrator Rayn was disassembled again and every component part was reanalyzed. Once again results were negative. She has not and will not, for security reasons, be reassembled.

We then turned to our last resort. In accordance with Executive Council's retraction of Section Fourteen of our orders, we cancelled the Subject. After cancellation he was placed in Anatomization Chamber. Dismembering process was completed and our full staff began to work.

It is now six o'clock (1:80 A.T.) in the evening. We have been at work on the Subject's body parts for nine hours. There is no trace of "love."

All of our earlier findings have been reconfirmed . . . we were able to locate the source of fear, intellect, sexual impulse, etc. Not one part of the body disclosed the source or the cause of "love." In the light of this depressing knowledge it is regrettable that cancellation of the Subject was found necessary.

Until we return to point of origin with a full report, herewith a final summary of our findings (with pertinent recommendations from this Commandant).

The planet offers ideal conditions for colonization.

The Species is, in almost every way, backward, particularly as to mental capacity.

Scientifically there would be no resistance worth our concern.

The Species has sufficient physical strength to accomplish our aims and to make colonization pleasant.

However, there remains the single deterrent, "love." With it the Subject was able to work miracles of a type capable of resistance to every instrument, scientific and mental, that we possess.

Therefore it is the recom-

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mendation of this Commandant that further plans for colonization be immediately halted.

We will transport the disassembled Rayn and the body parts of the Subject back with us to the point of origin.

We are masters of the principle of cause and effect. If there is a cause for "love"—and we know there *must* be —our race will find it soon!

Then and only then will the last obstacle to successful colonization be removed. When we have mastered "love" we will return to the Earth and this Species will be our slaves.

End of Ninth Report
From:
Rodor, Commandant,
Analysis-Base Triangle

THE END

"Better cut Murray off."

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DANGER, RED!

By O. H. LESLIE

ILLUSTRATOR: SUMMERS

This little dictator was going to ram regimentation down the throats of the people even if they had to kill HIM to do it.

THE GHOST writer was a young man with gray hair along both temples. This distinctive feature was the only pride he took in his appearance, for the rest of his face was too bony, the mouth too wide, the eyes too hound-dog sad. His name was Gar Mitchell.

Dr. Solomon Withers, Director of the Emotional Index, interviewed him in the doctor's own library, a sprawling, book-crammed room that smelled of tobacco and leather and burnt charcoal. He was flattered at the idea which Gar Mitchell presented to him. Yes, an autobiography *would* be a contribution to scientific understanding. And there *was* no reason to be shamefaced about employing a professional writer to do the job. After all, his forte was science.

"I'm no Hemingway," he told Gar jovially, twirling a cigar between his fingers. It was a slim cigar, its shape carefully chosen so as not to look unctious when stuck in the doctor's small-boned, boyish face. Dr. Withers was a handsome man in his early sixties, and he took pride in his appearance.

"Neither am I," Gar said. "A Hemingway, I mean."

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No citizen could hide his emotions from the glowing lights on the board.

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The doctor laughed. It was a good answer, and Gar knew it. He had felt from the start that the interview was a stagey affair. They were both playing roles, and he had to remember his lines.

"Nevertheless," Dr. Withers said, "your previous efforts proved your ability. But don't misunderstand me, Mr. Mitchell — or may I call you Gar?"

No, Gar thought dryly. *Call me Mr. Mitchell.* "Of course," he said aloud.

"Well, Gar, this is the point. I'm not interested in glamorizing my rather dull life. But what I want to leave posterity is the factual account of my life's work. I want to leave history the truth about the Emotionex."

Gar puzzled over this cue. Then he knew what he was supposed to say.

"I don't know, Dr. Withers. I won't be much good at explaining the Index. Plenty of good factual works already. I sort of lean towards *humanizing* a biography."

"And why not?" the doctor beamed. "Why not indeed?" He was so pleased by this response that he actually lit the cigar. "Nothing duller than a textbook, Mr. Mitchell—Gar. I want to tell the *human* side of the story. How I developed the Emotionex, the problems I had convincing Washington that the idea was sound, the opposition I faced—"

"That's more what I had in mind, Doctor."

"Yes. Yes," Dr. Withers said, drumming idly on the desk, a blue cloud already over his head. He had the distant look Gar recognized in many of his clients, the inward view of the day their autobiographies would be in book form, lauded by the *New York Times* "*. . . a valuable contribution to a vital subject*" featured in Brentano's window "*It's here! The book all America is reading!*" and signed by the modest author for relatives and friends "*. . . to Maybelle, my inspiration.*"

Gar coughed politely, and the doctor's reverie ended abruptly.

"Of course," he said briskly, "I want to give you a solid background of the Emotionex. I want you to know as much as I—barring technical matters, perhaps—about its workings. I'll arrange special permission for you to visit the Central Control building. I'm sure you'll find it very interesting."

"I'm sure I will," Gar said.

The doctor stood up, and the play was obviously over. But

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Gar couldn't resist one unrehearsed line.

"Dr. Withers, I wonder if I can ask you—"

For a moment, the doctor looked annoyed. Then the mood passed, and he was chuckling.

"I know. Most people are curious about it. You want to know if I, myself, am Indexed."

Gar reddened. "I'm afraid you've guessed it."

"Then look for yourself."

The doctor rolled back the sleeve of his brocaded smoking jacket. The faint blue letters on the underside of his forearm consisted of only three figures: SW–1.

"Low number," Gar murmured. "Mine's M79807J."

Dr. Withers snapped the sleeve back into place.

"A car will call for you at nine tomorrow. You'll be taken directly to the Central Control building. See you there."

"Yes, sir," the ghost answered, and passed silently, as ghosts should, out of the doctor's house.

Being a young man, Gar Mitchell was delighted with his first view of the Emotional Index's Central Control building. It was an airy, glass-enclosed, round-doomed structure just twenty miles north of Kansas City, Kansas. But it wasn't the architecture of the building which delighted him—it was the occupants. Seventy percent of the Emotionex staff was female, and they seemed to have been chosen with attractiveness as a prime hiring consideration.

He was sorry now that he had worn his gray sack suit, and that his morning shave had been cursory. But the lovely sloe-eyed technician who took him in charge didn't seem to mind. Her name was Drusilla Free. She made a sexy joke about her last name, and Gar blushed.

"Dr. Withers told me you're a writer," she said, leading him into a chrome-steeped, red plush waiting room. That's something new. Usually I give the inspection tour to Congressmen and such. Going to do a book?"

"Something like that."

"Well, the doctor's given you carte blanche. That's pretty unusual. Even *Time-Life* got only limited inspection privileges." She was studying his face, trying to determine his status. Drusilla Free had long blonde hair which she wore Godiva-style, tied in a pretty bowknot at the small of her back. Her powder-blue technician's uniform was cut

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with the closeness of a bathing suit. The effect was unprofessional, but Gar wasn't complaining.

"Just what do you do here, Miss Free?"

"Statistician. My business is figures."

Gar thought of a stale joke and abandoned it. "Quite a place. Afraid you'll find me rather dense, though. Never did understand this electronic stuff."

"I'm used to dealing with laymen," she said cooly, and Gar blushed again.

He followed the girl through a maze of offices, hard-put to keep pace with her fast-stepping high heels. Her long blonde hair streamed out behind her like a golden flag, and her commentary concerning the various departments of the Emotionex Center was clipped and mechanical. The bulk of the activity in the lower part of the building seemed to concern statistical duties, and the whirring, clacking, and humming of computors pervaded the atmosphere. Gar had absorbed very little by the time the first-floor tour had ended, except possibly an appreciation for the manner in which Miss Free walked.

His interest increased on the second floor, however, where the laboratories were located. In a long antiseptic room, filled with sunlight and pretty laboratory workers, the tiny Emotionex cathode tubes, bright blue and thin as matchsticks, were being produced by the thousands, ready for insertion in the forearms of all U. S. citizens over the age of fourteen. Gar witnessed an actual operation in a laboratory section devoted to such experimentation. He watched the white-coated lady interne make a neat incision in the arm of a young girl, causing only slight bleeding, and quickly insert the little blue tube. Her deft fingers stitched the wound with the finesse of an experienced seamstress. When she was finished, only the pale serial number of the Emotionex instrument showed through the outer skin.

"Swift and painless," Drusilla Free said gayly.

"Yes," Gar answered, his own forearm pulsating painfully in empathy. He watched the young girl staring at her arm, the tears standing in her eyes. The Emotionex tube would be there for good; it was a Federal offense to cause its removal.

"Now let's get to the heart of the Center," his guide offered. "The Control Board."

They entered through a

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sequence of electric-eyed doorways, halted each time by a grim - faced male security guard who asked biting questions about the purpose of their visit.

Then they came to the great domed room which housed the central unit of the Emotional Index—the massive master control board which indexed the emotional temperature of the fifty-one United States.

Gar was really impressed this time, and a look of almost childish wonderment and awe crossed his pale, bony face and caused Drusilla Free to chuckle with amusement.

"Really something, isn't it?" She smiled and squeezed his elbow. "I get little chills every time I come here. It's like a million Christmases, like fireworks, like—" She ran out of metaphors, and leaned against him like a lover hushed beneath the mystery of the stars.

The Master Control Board of the U. S. Emotional Index swept a hundred and fifty feet in a great arc around the room. Its base color was jet black, and the map which depicted the United States and territories was outlined brilliantly in white. But it wasn't the enormity of the map which caught your breath. It was the glittering, dancing, corruscating, sparkling display of half a million tiny colored lights across its face. Blue winks and red blinks, white flashes and yellow flickers, green and brown and orange and purple and a hundred other hues rippled ceaselessly over the giant board.

For the first time, Gar noticed the bank of high-set swiveling leather chairs at the base of the board. In the center chair, a familiar little figure in a burly tweed suit spun around and smiled towards them.

"Gar, my boy!"

The doctor hopped off his perch and skipped towards the Ghost like a high-spirited schoolboy. He patted Miss Free's waist paternally, but kept his small hand there while he spoke to Gar.

"Impressed?" he grinned.

"Very. I had no idea—"

"And this is only the Master. There are many more Index boards in the other sections, each one pinpointing smaller areas across the country. The varigated colors, as I'm sure you know, represent various wavelengths of emotion throughout the nation at this very minute—all the way from mild displeasure to wild joy and murderous anger." He frowned suddenly, and looked

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over his shoulder at the board. "Anger . . ." he said musingly.

"What is it?" Drusilla asked.

"Eh? Nothing, nothing. Well, how are you treating our friend, Drusilla?"

"She's doing fine," Gar said loyally.

"That's good. But I think I'll take over from here, Drusilla dear. You can run along.

Drusilla did, and the doctor watched her retreat with thoughtful interest. Then he snapped out of the mood and rubbed his hands electrically. "Well! Now let's you and I talk a bit."

They paced up and down the length of the winking board, the doctor strutting with his hands behind his back, Gar ambling along after him, trying to catch his words.

"Crisis," the doctor was saying. "Crisis. That's what finally sold the idea, Gar. For two years after the War, I and my associates pleaded with the government to establish an emotional indexing system, but they refused to accept the idea. Not even the Cleveland riots, or that bloody revolt in California, made them see the urgent necessity. But sooner or later, they had to face it. We're living in explosive times, Gar. More dangerous than the world has ever known. The war was one thing; terrible enough, but at least it gave us good clean channeling of the emotions. Fight, kill, avenge—good clear emotional direction. But afterwards — chaos. Ever-increasing disorder and anarchy and emotional peaks and valleys. Crisis, and the Index became a must. A must!"

He paused, and dropped his voice conversationally. "You're tapping all this, of course?"

"What?" Gar grinned lamely. "Sorry—I forgot." He reached in to touch the machine in his pocket. "All set now."

"Yes," Dr. Withers repeated. "Crisis. The Index was mandatory—a clear necessity. A method to keep track of all emotions as they swept through the human organisms, a means of detecting group hatred and violence before it reached the danger point. A precursor of crime, a warning of imminent revolt —the Index has provided us with the first effective means of taming the wildest beast of all—the emotion of man."

He looked very pleased with this speech, and ended it by jamming a cigar between his teeth.

One of the Board workers,

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a brunette with horn-rimmed glasses, came up quietly behind them, and finally touched the doctor's shoulder.

"Eh? What is it?"

"Pardon me, Dr. Withers. You wanted to be informed about the Red condition. It's extended beyond Sector 40."

"What's that?" the doctor looked bewildered.

"You wanted to be informed, sir. The pattern is distinctly unusual—"

"Don't tell me what's unusual!" The cigar jumped. "I'll decide that for myself."

Gar cleared his throat. "Anything wrong?"

"Nothing we can't handle."

The doctor walked towards the center of the control board, squaring his narrow shoulders. Gar followed closely.

"The paths of human emotion are strange. Sometimes there are — discrepancies. Unusual formations. Coincidences?"

"What kind of coincidences?"

The doctor took the cigar from his mouth and waved it towards the California coast line.

"See that Red pattern extending from Oakland to Death Valley? A direct mass movement of the red lights between the two points. We noticed it early last week."

"What does it mean?"

"Can't tell exactly. There's anger, that's for certain. Red is the color of the Anger wavelength. But it's so oddly concentrated—"

"There are other red lights on the board."

"Thousand of them!" Dr. Withers snapped. "People get angry all the time. But the pattern is too steady, too consistent. It's a freak, of course. A crazy coincidence—"

"I see," Gar said.

"We're running a local check of the area. We'll pin down this anger. The California Index board has been working all morning. We'll get the answer."

He seemed to be calmed by his own explanation. He guided Gar into an adjoining room, where smaller versions of the Emotionex Board were flashing their own colorful varieties of light patterns.

The operator of the California Index was a chubby young man, given to easy perspiration. The dew had settled heavily on his round face as he made notations on the pad in front of him.

"Well, Conners?" Dr. Withers said. "Pinned down this little situation of ours?"

"Yes, sir. The Anger pat-

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tern seems to be heavily concentrated in the city districts of Oakland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and other large population centers. However, there seems to be some overflow into the smaller counties—"

"You're being vague, Conners. I could tell that much from the big board. You keep working on it. If the pattern continues until tomorrow, contact the Service and get them to investigate. Might be a riot brewing, or maybe that National People's movement again—"

As they walked off, Gar said: "The Service?"

"Secret Service," Dr. Withers frowned. "They come into the picture when a dangerous emotional pattern is reported by the Index. Not that I think anything's wrong."

"Of course."

"But you can't be too careful. The nation is full of unrest. I remember what I told Congress six years ago, when I testified before that committee. I told them—you taking this down?"

"Yes, sir. Recording machine's on, Doctor."

"Good, good. 'Gentlemen,' I told them . . ."

Gar's first week was confusing. It was a bad time to learn the operational procedure of the Emotional Index, for the staff of Emotionex were somewhat confused themselves.

On Monday of the second week, Drusilla Free said: "Red pattern's spread northeast as far as Salt Lake. And there seems to be a similar pattern coming from as far north as Seattle. Dr. Withers doesn't seem too worried about it, but other people are concerned . . ."

"What about the Secret Service?" Gar asked. "Haven't they uncovered anything?"

"No. Nothing very much. They've been questioning people all week, people whose individual Index shows a constant Anger emotion. But they haven't discovered anything worthwhile."

"Sounds like something brewing," Gar said casually. "Or maybe the doctor's right. Maybe it's just a matter of coincidence . . ."

"Coincidence!" Dr. Withers said that same afternoon. They were working in the doctor's book-lined study, and the little man's demeanor had lost the relaxed air he had worn only a week before. "Anybody can get angry, Gar. For a thousand reasons. Look!"

He rolled up the sleeve of his

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smoking jacket, and shoved his arm beneath Gar's eyes. Under the pale blue number, SW-1, the Index tube was glowing a faint red.

"See?" he said. "I'm angry now!"

Then the doctor laughed abruptly, rolled down the sleeve and tipped back in the swivel chair. Gar looked absently out of the study window at the dappled pattern of light and shade on the lawn.

"Well, let's get going. Where was I, Gar?"

"You were discussing your speech before the committee."

"Oh, yes. Well, I told them the plain facts, the unvarnished truth. The world had learned little or nothing from the war. All the hydrogen bombs in the universe couldn't change the one factor that kept man chained to violence and chaos. Emotion. Raw emotion! Unless intellect found a means for keeping track of the wild paths of human feelings, the country was doomed to a succession of riots, self-inaugurated political factions, private armies and parochial wars, looting, bloodshed, turmoil, total disunity. Emotion had to be checked, tabulated, just as surely as if it were a chronic disease whose only hope was constant vigilance and surveillance. You sure that machine is on?"

"Yes, sir," Gar said, tapping the gadget in his pocket.

"Good. Well, I finally made them listen to reason. Within a year, the Emotional Index Act was the law of the land. Within six months after the enactment, insertion of the Index tubes was 90% complete. And the Index began showing results already. You remember, of course. That business in Ohio . . ."

"Oh, yes. The Ohio Massacre."

"Please!" Dr. Withers looked pained. "Don't refer to it by that vulgar name. The Ohio Insurrection is the accepted phrase. Without the Index to detect the surge of violent emotion in that area, there would have been a far more dreadful result. As it is, the information the Index provided the Government helped them quell a treasonable revolt which could have caused the lives of many thousands."

"Seems to me there *were* thousands killed, Dr. Withers."

"Hundreds! Only hundreds! The facts are grossly misquoted. The Government troops killed only a few hundred of the rebels. And it was a necessity. Nobody denies that."

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"Of course," Gar said.

The telephone rang, and Dr. Withers snatched the receiver from its cradle, and barked "Well?" He listened in silence for a moment, and then slammed it down again.

"Anything wrong?"

"The anger pattern," the doctor said. "I just don't understand it! The pattern has blanketed Idaho and Montana and is coming southward rapidly. Yet the Service can't seem to detect any open hostility anywhere we send them."

"That's seven states in less than two weeks," Gar said mildly. "California, Nevada, Arizona, Oregon—"

"I know, I know! You don't have to list them." He scratched his head vigorously. "I suppose I should get over to the Control Board—"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let's finish this chapter first. Then we'll see."

The red lights winked across the master control board of the Emotional Index, a bloody swath across the western coast of the United States. Gar stared at the floodtide of angry red lights, until he felt the breath of Drusilla Free at the back of his neck.

"Look," she was saying.

"What is it?"

"In the East. Massachusetts and New Hampshire—"

"I don't see what you mean."

"We're getting an Anger proportion that's almost thirty percent above normal for those states. And that's only since Monday. If it keeps up, we may have both coasts covered by the end of this week."

"Can't they do something?" Gar said.

Drusilla shrugged. "Nothing to do. No harm is being done. There's no violence anywhere, no arming, no rioting. People are just—angry."

"How's the doctor taking it? Haven't seen him since the beginning of the week."

"He's upset, of course. The Government can't find anything wrong, so they're questioning whether the Index might be faulty. That's got him on edge."

"What do you think about it?"

"I don't think," the girl said, rubbing against his arm.

It was twilight outside the doctor's study, three weeks from the inception of the Withers autobiography. The doctor paced the carpet in the fast-darkening room, until Gar reached over and snapped on the desk lamp.

"Eh?" Dr. Withers said, startled.

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"Just turning on the lights," Gar said.

"Oh. Where was I?"

"'A new interpretation of freedom.'"

"Did I say that? Not bad. Might make a chapter heading out of that, Gar."

"Yes, sir."

"A new interpretation of freedom," the doctor repeated. A new kind of security for the nation, a protection against the untethered and dangerous emotions. It's ridiculous to say that the People were against the Index. The only real objectors were the radicals, the professional do-gooders, bleeding hearts, the hypocrites cackling about the rights of man. But they were the vocal ones, Gar, that was the trouble. They were vocal, and the great masses who supported the Index in humble silence—they were never heard from. So you might get the erroneous impression that America didn't *want* the little blue tube in their arm. Wrong! Dead wrong! America wanted the Index. America *needed* the Index. That's a fact which history will support. That's my theme, Gar. Work on it. See if you can develop a title. Something like, History is on My Side."

"Yes, sir."

"What's the matter with you, Gar?" The doctor peered at him. "You look sleepy. Sure you're listening?"

"Oh, yes, sir. And if I did miss anything—well, there's my little machine."

"Hmm. I guess you're worried about the Anger pattern. Well, forget it. I made a careful check on the Index this very afternoon. Working smooth as ever. Not a thing wrong with the mechanism."

"But the pattern. That hasn't stopped, sir?"

"Stopped? On the contrary, It's spread. East Coast has it down to Georgia and part of Florida. And it shows signs of heading west to Alabama and Mississippi."

"Any idea what it all means?"

"How should I know?" The doctor's voice rose indignantly. "That's the Government's job. I supply the emotional facts. They've got to do the policing!"

"Yes, sir," Gar said, yawning.

It was the end of the third week.

In the Emotional Index's great domed room, Gar Mitchell watched the half-million tiny lights on the giant master control board dance and wink, and the prevalent motif was red.

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Great splashes of red washed up and down the east and west coast of the United States. Red swirled around the southwestern and southeastern areas of the nation. Red was creeping slowly along the northern section and down the Great Lakes area, over the Dakotas and Wisconsin and Illinois . . .

"It's crazy," Dr. Withers murmured, his eyes on the spreading crimson lights. "It doesn't make any sense. There's no sense to it!"

Drusilla Free touched him gently. "Would you like some coffee?"

"No, no!"

"I'll have some," Gar told her. "Looks like we're in for a long seige. Dr. Withers won't leave until the next report from the Service."

The doctor whirled to him. "Take this down, Gar. Let's not waste time. On that chapter concerning the Ohio Massa —the Ohio Insurrection. I have some thoughts on the opening. I want you to dig up the articles that appeared—"

A technician interrupted. "Sorry, Doctor. Telephone for you from Washington."

"Washington?" The doctor's face paled. "Maybe they've learned something—" He scrutinized the board once more, and grimaced at the ever-increasing redness of its winking lights. Then he muttered something and followed the technician into another area of the floor.

He returned some five minutes later, and his round boyish face was exuberant.

"Now we're getting somewhere!" He rubbed his hands until the skin made dry, crackling noises. "Now we'll get to the bottom of this!"

"What's happened?" Gar said.

"The Service finally tracked down some of the instigators of the Anger. *Agents provocateurs,* spreading their poison across the country, silently, stealthily—a national movement against the government—"

"Who are they?" Drusilla said. "What do they want?"

"Who knows? A thousand and one senseless causes sweep this mad population of ours. The whole world is psychotic! But now we're tracking them down. The Index hasn't failed us!"

"But the Anger spread so fast—"

"Of course! The tempo of madness. The heedless speed of neurotic imbalance! From one to another, these rebels have been passing their anger, until it's spread like a plague

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across the country. But now we'll stop. Now we'll fix them—"

"Speaking of trouble," Gar said softly, "look."

Their eyes returned to the great board. Despite Dr. Withers' joyful announcement, the grim waves of red light had now almost completely inundated the white-outlined map. The concentration of red was so pronounced that the one area still relatively unbloodied stood out from the rest like a white ship in a crimson ocean.

"Kansas," Drusilla breathed. "They're surrounding Kansas,"

"Nonsense!" The doctor's own face was crimsoned by a rush of blood. "It's a coincidence—a trick. The people want the Index. The people *need* the Index."

"Dr. Withers! The brunette technician, her horn-rimmed glasses in her hand, came to their side. "Doctor, there are crowds outside the building."

"Crowds? What are you talking about?"

"People. Lots of them. Just watching the building. I don't like it, Doctor—"

"You must be mistaken. What do they want? Ask them what they want!"

"But there are thousands of them! They're like a mob—only they're so very quiet—"

Now the red lights on the giant board were flashing violently, and slowly covering the area of Kansas.

"Call Washington," Dr. Withers said evenly. "Call the Secret Service. Tell them what's happening. Tell them to send help at once. Call somebody—"

"It's no use," Gar Mitchell told him. "They've been waiting a long time, Doctor. They've been moving quietly, planning, doing nothing overt. But the Anger has been building in them, Doctor. Building until the time came to make a move . . ."

"What are you saying?" The little man stared at him, his eyes wide and frightened. "How do you know all this? What's your part in this business, Mitchell?"

"A leading role," Gar said.

He lifted the tape machine from his pocket. But it wasn't a tape machine. When he flicked the lever that began the inexorable process of the mechanism, Drusilla Free moaned with fear, and Dr. Withers screamed like a woman. When Gar hurled the explosive device towards the great Index board, they could glimpse the glowing red tube in his forearm.

THE END

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The little old lady met Tet on a New York street corner. Tet had thrilling plans for the future. So did the little old lady. The question was, which had the—

Appointment With Mr. Armstrong

By D. E. KAYE

IT WAS one of those long traffic lights that never want to change. The little old lady shifted the heavy shopping bag from one hand to the other, rubbing out the soreness against the smooth cloth of her black silk coat. She turned up her palm to inspect the damage. A deep red line almost obscured the network of tiny wrinkles.

"Would you like me to carry that for a little while? It looks mighty heavy for a little girl your size!" The voice was soft, with a gentle humor to it, but it took the old lady by surprise. Her head turned quickly.

"Oh, no, thank you!" she answered with a kind of breathless embarrassment. "I don't have too far to go after this crossing." Then, quickly, "But thank you again. It's very sweet of you to ask."

The slim young girl beside her laughed easily, tossing a fine head of close-cropped blonde curls. "Now, now," she drawled, "that's nothing. I always carry Grandma's packages back home. Come on, let me take that. I'm sure it must be much too heavy for you."

She reached down for the handles. The old lady pulled back a few inches, still tugging at the bag. "Well . . ." she hesitated, "I don't like to bother . . . but are you sure you won't . . ."

"Of course, I won't mind! Come now, let me have that. Why, I'll bet that bag weighs more than all of little you put together! Why, nobody back home would let Grandma

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carry anything like that—not only me!"

The old lady smiled, brushing away a whisp of fine gray hair that had blown across her rimless glasses. She let the girl take the shopping bag, which miraculously seemed to shed half its weight in the transfer.

"I must say, you're a sweet child," she ventured still somewhat cautiously. "You don't see many of your kind around here anymore. That is, here in New York. Everybody hurrying about their own business, not caring who they bump into, never stopping to say they're sorry, and certainly never asking if they might help an old lady!" The last came out with enough conviction to straighten her thin bent shoulders. "My goodness! Here I am jabbering away and we missed that light! And you carrying that heavy bag for me. You know, I don't even know your name, so that I can thank you properly. Guess I'm getting just as bad as the rest around here!"

She seemed almost gay with excitement now. Freed of her heavy burden, her small bony hands fluttered about like tiny wooden clappers.

The young girl chuckled. "Well, now, isn't that so?" A fast wink punctuated the question. "It's Tet Lucas. That's Tet for Margaret. Kinda lingered on from the time I was too young to say my own name properly. And I'm here from Alabama, just outside of Whistler—where everyone sends their mail on Mother's Day so they can get the postal mark on it! We're sorta famous for that—you know, Whistler's Mother? Everybody knows that."

The old lady nodded. "How nice!"

"And Jimmy and me—we are getting married next month. That's my beau, you know, and Grandma thought it would be real fine if I came up to New York to kinda look around at furniture on accounta you really can't buy anything good like that in Whistler."

"Really?"

"Oh, not really smart things. And Jimmy's building our home himself, and he deserves the best, Grandma says. He's a builder, Jimmy is, only I tease him and call him an architect! Grandma thinks that's real fine too. She says you have to make a man feel important! Grandma raised me, you see." She slapped a pretty, lightly manicured hand to her full pink lips. "Oh, but how *could* you see! We

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just met! And here I am talking like a little magpie!"

A tiny frown found a place for itself on her smooth shiny forehead. The girl continued. "I guess it's just that it isn't easy to find anyone to talk to up North here, and I reckon maybe I'm just a wee bit lonesome for Grandma too!" She turned large, eager eyes toward the old lady. "You know, you *do* look a bit like Grandma, at that! Honestly! Maybe that's why I asked to carry your shopping bag. Just think of that, way up here in New York! May I ask your name too? Sure wasn't very neighborly of me not to. I guess I just got carried away."

The old lady's pale blue eyes twinkled. "Well, Tet, it's just Barbara Terrance—Miss Barbara Terrance. I'm afraid I'm what you'd call an old maid, so I guess I can't be too much like your very nice Grandma. At least I never had the good fortune to have a lovely granddaughter like you to raise! Oh, I had lots of little children I used to like to imagine were mine when I still taught school, but even that was a long, long time ago! But if you're going to be in New York for a spell, why don't you let me have a little of Grandma's fun and take you to tea some afternoon? I'd love that kind of pretending, even at my age!"

"Why, Miss Terrance, that would be lovely! I'll be up here all the rest of this week, and I'm sure we can arrange something. Let's talk about it while I help you home with this bundle. I'm in no hurry." Tet reached over to take the old lady's arm. "Here now, let's make this light!"

It happened so fast that neither Tet nor Miss Terrance saw anything but a huge black shadow plummeting over them. A sickening screech of wheels and it was all over.

Where the street corner was almost deserted a moment before, now it swarmed with faces, hard in horror. Twenty-odd feet away, a shopping bag lay open and torn, its assorted contents of potatoes, oranges, and new spool thread rolling aimlessly down the highway. A truck driver sat limply on his running board, his large hands washing the skin off each other, his beard-shadowed chin pressed hard to his chest. From off in the distance, the sound of a shrill siren pierced the silent crowd.

"Mr. Armstrong! Mr. Armstrong! Where are you?" Miss Terrance called sharply, impatiently, tightening a hat pin into a fold of her rough black

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straw sailor. "I'm waiting for you!"

"Right over here, Miss Terrance. You mustn't get nervous, you know." The voice had the deep sustained quality of an organ note.

With small, precise steps, the old lady elbowed her way through the solidly massed crowd. She never touched one of the persons standing there.

At the far outer edge stood Mr. Armstrong, one long arm resting easily at his side, the other poised for a handshake.

The old lady bounced to a stop in front of him. "So, you are Mr. Armstrong! Well!" she gasped, stretching her small bony neck to look up into his face, fully two feet above her. "Now why in goodness knows did they tell me to ask for you?"

Since she was obviously going to ignore the handshake Mr. Armstrong dropped it to his side. He continued, still patient and gentle. "They all have to ask for me, sooner or later, Miss Terrance. You knew that, didn't you?"

"Knew what?"

"That you've just died. You are to come with me now. They all do."

"Why, I declare!" It was more of a series of gasps than words. "Of all the nonsense! You just can't stand here and tell me when I'm dead and when I'm not. I'm just not ready to die! If you're waiting around for someone to just up and stop living, why not pick on somebody else? This will certainly upset my plans for California this summer! Or don't you take such things into consideration?" She brushed beligerently at a dust spot on her coat.

"I'm truly sorry about that, Miss Terrance," he continued calmly, "but who would you suggest I take in your place? I can't go back alone, you know, when I'm given two return tickets. The rules, you understand . . ."

"Poppycot! What rules?" She thought for a minute, kneading her thin pale lips in the effort. "That girl!" she cried, suddenly. "Tet! We both stepped off the curb together. It was her fault as much as mine, why isn't she here instead of me? I'm an old lady, I should think I deserve a little more courtesy when it comes to ordering people around!"

An almost imperceptible smile sat lightly on Mr. Armstrong's face. "You really want me to take Tet instead? I'm not sure, but there still may be a few minutes' time . . . if you're sure?"

"Why . . . yes! I have other

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plans, I told you! Can't you understand, I've never been to California and I don't have too many years left to do any of those things I've always wanted to, Mr. Armstrong. You do understand, don't you? This is so upsetting!"

"And *her* plans, Miss Terrance? Tet's plans? You were going to hear all about them at tea, weren't you?"

She had forgotten about that. "Goodness me!" Her tiny hand slapped sharply at her cheek. "What will she ever think? I guess I'll never make that tea-date now. And such a sweet child, too, stopping like that to help an old lady with her bundles! You know, Mr. Armstrong, that child was just dying to talk to someone —and she wanted so much to tell me about . . . about . . ." The word sat motionless on her lips. . . .

> . . . about Jimmy, that nice boy who was a builder . . . no, not a builder, an architect . . . yes, an architect . . . about Grandma who's waiting for her to come home . . . with a new lavender lace dress for the wedding . . . a wedding she's dreamed for so long.

"She wanted to tell you about . . . what, Miss Terrance?" Mr. Armstrong placed his long arm on the old lady's shoulder.

"Mr. Armstrong!" she said, tossing off his arm with small bits of feminine impatience. "You said you had two tickets. Now for heaven's sake don't keep me waiting any longer."

Inside the ambulance one of the doctors reached for his cigarettes while the other held the blanket firmly over the girl's foot.

"Whatd'ya make of it, Mike?"

"Well, the girl's got a real good chance. I'm sure she'll come out with just this fracture. One of those blo's standing around said she was carrying a damn heavy shopping bag, filled with potatoes and stuff—and it looks to me like when the jerk truck driver hit, he hit the bag and that sent her flyin' off to the side.

"But that poor old lady, she musta got it head on." He bit hard on his lower lip. "You know something, Carl? I coulda swore I heard a heartbeat when we got there! Seems impossible, but I'm *sure* I did."

The other doctor sighed, "Hell, I hate these calls! You got her purse? She sure looked to me like someone's Grandma. . . ."

THE END

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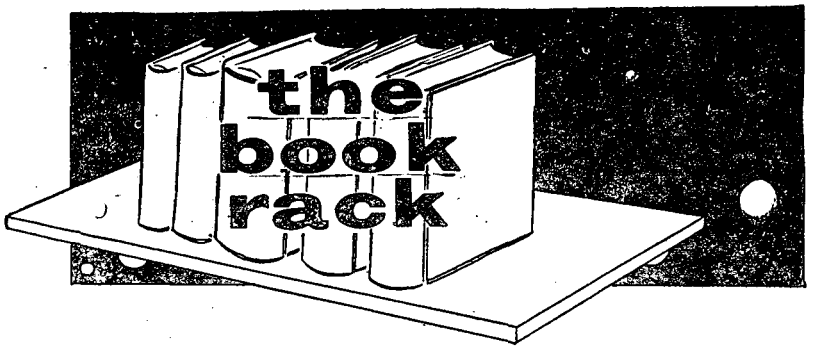

BY S. E. COTTS

STAR GIRL. *By Henry Winterfeld. 191 pp. Harcourt, Brace and Company. $2.75.*

Need a tonic? Long for a breath of clean, warm air? Then *Star Girl* is the very book you need.

I am still not sure what fortunate wind blew this slim, charming volume into my room. All I know is that when I reached out for the next book, there it was, perched modestly on top of a volume featuring a huge, purple-eyed monster who was lifting a screaming, shapely young lady into the air. I yelped, grabbed *Star Girl,* and ran out of the room slamming the door behind me.

A group of children find a strange little girl named Mo in the forest. She tells them that she is from another planet and that she fell out of her father's spaceship as it hovered over the Earth. They believe her story unquestioningly. Their great mistake is in taking her home for the day to help her pass the time until her father comes to pick her up that evening. None of the grownups believe Mo and they call in the policeman who is convinced that she has simply run away from home and is inventing a wild tale to cover that fact. Bewildered, Mo does run away and spends the day learning the strange ways of Earth people.

To be honest with the readers, I will say I'm not sure whether my enjoyment stemmed wholly from the book itself or just from the change of pace from monsters, meteors, and Martian marauders. Either way, this whimsical tale is a must both for young readers and the cynical old generation of S-F addicts.

SOLOMON'S STONE. *By L. Sprague de Camp. 224 pp. Avalon Books. $2.75.*

Solomon's Stone starts out to be a fairly entertaining book. Prosper Nash, a staid CPA, was invited to his friend Monty Stark's

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house on All Saints' Eve. Stark's hobby was magic and he was going to perform some sorcery for his friends. Imagine his surprise when at the climax of his spell, Bechard, a real demon appears instead of the costumed friend Stark had arranged for. Bechard says he is going to take over the body of one of those in the room. The next thing Prosper Nash knows, he is on the astral plane in the body of a dashing French cavalier, something he had always secretly imagined himself; and Bechard is on Earth in his body. The majority of the book concerns Nash's efforts to find the Shamir —Solomon's Stone—which would undo Bechard's spell.

Here is a setup for a delightful spoof, and in the beginning de Camp does all right by it. There are many lovely touches in the descriptions of the people who inhabit the astral plane—each one someone's idealization of himself. As is often the case, however, the author doesn't know when to call it quits; he piles zany detail on top of zany detail until the whole thing is too heavy and drawn-out for the slender plot that supports it. Then rather abruptly he puts a stop to it with a milk-and-water ending as though even he, its author, has tired of it.

EARTH IS ROOM ENOUGH. *By Isaac Asimov. 192 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. $2.95.*

A talking insect that gets hypnotic control of a family; the entertainment world of the future where rival dreamie companies find themselves with a new means of communication but an age-old problem; a robot that helps straighten out a faltering marriage; the frightening possibilities of an instrument which can view the past —these are but a few of the topics that Isaac Asimov chooses to explore in his new anthology.

They are not all of the same high quality—a few depend too much on a trick or gimmick; but even the less good ones compel you to read. There is a wide range in length also. Some are merely thumbnail sketches; one is practically a novelette. The one common element in all the stories is their locale here on Earth. Though this similarity might limit some writers, Mr. Asimov thrives on it and so will the readers.

Also included are two poems which this reviewer will not comment on out of respect for Mr. Asimov.

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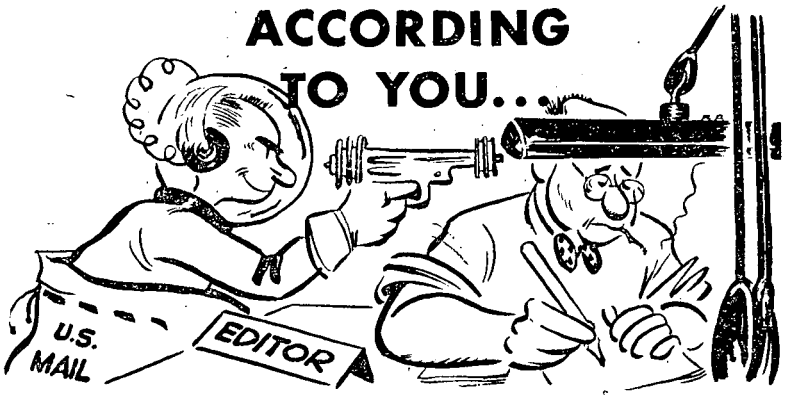
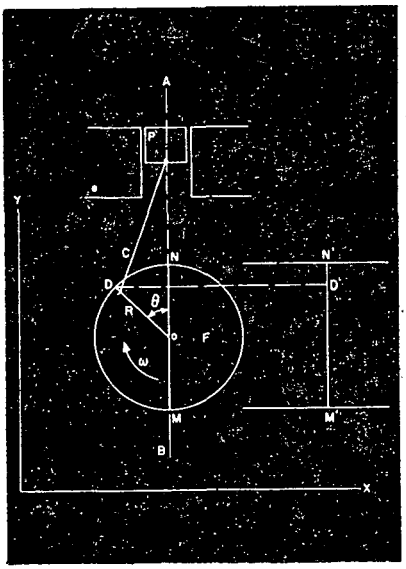


BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

I find that I must take exception to the solution to the piston problem presented in your October issue by Mr. Sowle.

The first order of business is to define what stop means. It is my belief that stop means to reduce velocity to zero. On the basis of this definition one can show mathematically that the piston must stop. Such a proof is enclosed.



Question: Does the Piston, P, stop if the flywheel, F, is rotating with constant angular velocity?

Nomenclature:

AB = Center line of Piston, P & flywheel, F
P = Piston
C = Connecting rod
R = Radius of flywheel
F = Flywheel
W = Angular velocity of flywheel F (Rodians/unit time)
$\ominus$ = Instantaneous angle between OD and center line AB
D = Connection between flywheel & connecting rod
M'N' = Projection of flywheel on a line parallel to AB

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D′ = Projection of point D on M′N′

MN = The projection M′N′ translated so that it passes through O, the center of the flywheel and remains parallel to M′N′

O = Center of flywheel

Since this is a theoretical problem let us consider the point D to be located at a distance R from O.

It follows that if the piston, P, stops, that the vertical velocity component of the point D is O at the same instant. If P does not stop, the vertical velocity component of D is never O.

So let us examine the equation of motion for the projection D′ of D on the line M′N′.

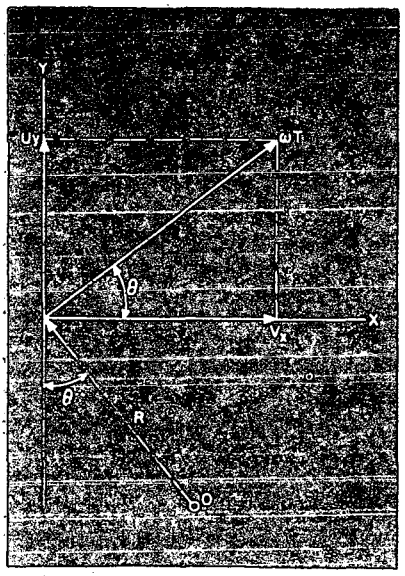
U_T = Tangential velocity of point D $\therefore U_T = WR$.

But since velocity is a vector it can be resolved into its X and Y components.

The vector U_T is perpendicular to the radius R.

$U_Y = U_T \sin \Theta = WR \sin \Theta$

$\Theta = WT$



T = time

$V_Y = WR \sin WT$

$U_Y = O$ at $WT = O$ & Π

a = acceleration

$\frac{dUY}{dt} = WR \cos WT = Ay$

$\frac{dUy}{dt} = O$ at $WT = \frac{\Pi}{2}$ & $\frac{3\Pi}{2}$

$\therefore$ When the point D is at either M or N its velocity is zero but it is at max acceleration.

Henry H. George, Jr.
c/o Mrs. M. F. Clickner
Mountainview Ave.
Troy, New York

We are presenting Mr. George's solution to the piston problem rather than that of Mr. Steven Steckler, as promised in last month's issue, because of space problems. Mr. Steckler's was less condensed but equally convincing.

Dear Editor:

On page 124, November issue, of your magazine, you have given

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the answer to the Piston Problem in which you stated that the piston did not stop at the end of each stroke. Maybe I misunderstood your conception of the word stop. As I understand it, it means zero acceleration and zero velocity. If you agree with me on this, then you must agree that at the end of each stroke of the piston along the line AB the piston comes to zero velocity and zero acceleration, which it must in order for it to accelerate in the opposite direction along the line AB. Therefore, at the end of the stroke, top or bottom of the cylinder, the piston "stops" momentarily before accelerating in the opposite direction.

Please give me your opinion on this.

Duane E. MacLeod, Jr.
1138 I St., Apt. 6
Anchorage, Alaska

● *Henry H. George, Jr., agrees with you, Duane.*

Dear Editor:

I just finished reading the November issue of *Fantastic*. "The Wife Factory" by Clyde Mitchell was a very interesting story, almost as good as "A Pattern for Monsters." I also liked G. Vandenberg's "Who Stole Carnegie Hall." "The Cosmic Trap," by Gerald Vance was also an interesting story.

A while ago you said you can't bat a thousand in every issue you print, but you certainly score high for me.

Why do you have a section in History, "Boost Your I.Q.," when you can use that space for science fiction?

Stephen Rotman
70 Linwood St.
Malden, Mass.

● *The majority of our readers agreed with you, sir. Therefore, no more quiz features.*

Dear Editor:

A few days ago I happened to purchase the November issue of your magazine and have enjoyed reading the science fiction stories therein. On page 124, however, was a bit of fiction which was not clearly labeled as such.

I am referring to the "Answer to the Piston Problem." I note in reading this over that the motion of the piston depends on a connection between said piston and the con-rod; this connection point (call it Q) being on the line AB. However, if we consider *any point* on line AB and inquire whether the point of connection, Q, is ever at that point, your line of reasoning yields a definite "NO" answer.

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This is obvious since the piston, along with point Q, is in constant motion, and, thus, point Q will require zero time to pass any point on the line AB; therefore, point Q is *never* at any point on line AB! Thus, point Q must be somewhere else, and the connection becomes impossible.

Perhaps it is useless for me to worry about this, however, for the same reasoning proves that the piston itself is nowhere along AB. I suspect, also, that the flywheel, F, will vanish under application of this line of reasoning; and then, "of course," the whole problem ceases to exist, doesn't it?

D. B. Robinson
3208 S. Barrington Ave.
Los Angeles 66, Calif.

◎ *The Nays certainly seem to have it in relation to that derned piston problem.*

Dear Editor:

The November issue of *Fantastic* was fantastically better than ever.

Each of the stories was cleverly written within the realm of fantastic situations. As I have stated many times, an escape from our everyday humdrums or something.

W. C. Brandt
Apt. N
1725 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Calif.

◎ *Someday, we're going to leave W. C. out. It will break our hearts to do it, though.*

Dear Editor:

Upon receiving the October issue of *Fantastic* I could only hold it at a safe distance and smirk.

The Valigursky cover was rapidly destroyed upon sight. I thought I was going to read a story on the Flash Gordon vs. Mongo line. I was rather pleasantly surprised with the cover story, however. That picture of the barbarian was purely sexy though.

I enjoy Harlan Ellison's writing, but he got carried away in his letter, I think. What he says in regard to G. Wells' letter is nothing but childish. I could say, too, when I saw an s-f mag: "Now here is trash. It couldn't possibly be. There are discrepancies in every story. Why they publish it just to appease a few neurotics is beyond me." But I don't. The same is true when I reply to the jokes and gripes that I get from some of my s-f correspondents. For example: one

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fan I heard from who had just moved, was jokingly cursing his new home town for not carrying the top s-f magazines. I could have written back and said: "If you don't like it, why'd you move there?" But I'd have made an enemy out of him. Besides, I laughed, I say things like that too. That's what keeps fans together. What's the use of a letter-column or fandom if we can't have our private jokes, disputes and fun? I know there wouldn't be any reason for a letter section if everyone wrote only reviews of past issues, and subjects only of top interest. That's what fanzines are for, and they're even more private (I don't mean that like it sounds) than letters in prozines. We've got to think we can communicate with other fans in the column, also the editor and the writers of the stories.

I'd like to ask the other fans for offers on trades for old copies of *Fantastic*. This last issue is the only one I've seen on the stands in a long long time. (This newsstand situation has to go.)

Vince Roach
3443 South Sadlier Road
Indianapolis 19, Ind.

◉ *Why not shoot in a subscription, Vince. Four dollars and you're in for a year.*

Dear Editor:

I have been a reader of your magazine for about a year. During all that time I have enjoyed every issue. However, in the December, '57, copy I saw something that made me pretty mad. In "A Choice of Miracles," the Lutheran Church is inferred to be a sect. I, as a Lutheran, resent my church being called a sect.

The Lutheran Church is one of the fastest growing and best respected. I hope you will get this straightened out.

Charles J. Moscato
59 Varet St.
Brooklyn, N. Y.

◉ *No disrespect whatsoever was intended by use of the word "sect." Funk & Wagnell's Dictionary defines the word as "The adherents collectively of a particular creed or confession; a denomination." We are indeed sorry to have offended you, sir.*

Dear Editor:

Although I am an avid s-f fan, I do not often take the time to write letters of praise for the good stories which appear in your monthlies. However, after reading Mr. Jarvis' story in the December issue, I couldn't resist the temptation.

My compliments to him on his ability to take a single, small idea

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and expand it into a delightful story. In all fairness, however, it certainly seemed a long way to tip a rareie.

Raymond S. Ferell
Berea, Kentucky

• *The story Mr. Ferell refers to was titled: "If This Be Utopia."*

Dear Editor:

Just bought a copy of your November issue of *Fantastic*. (Unlike the States, the November issue gets here in November.) I have a few comments to make: a note to W. C. Brandt. If you can't see any sex in the stories in *Fantastic* I would suggest that you see a doctor. (No offense intended, of course.) It's there just as big as life. Now, I'm one of sex's greatest advocates but even I must admit that *Fantastic* is science-fiction's sexiest mag. As for a comparison of s-f today with that in the "good old days" I would say that, in general it's just as good and in some few cases better today than it was then. *Fantastic* is an example. I could hardly say that it has improved its standards or decreased them because the *Fantastic* of today is printing stories of an entirely different type than those that the mag. of yesteryear printed. Whether the change is good or bad I would hardly feel able to say.

Now to a sore point that the November issue touched in me. That was the "Boost Your I.Q." quiz. Supposedly, this quiz was on archaeology but actually it did not even begin to touch on the archaeology that I was taught when I went to college. I think you and your readers will find that there is a great deal of difference between Old World or Classical Achaeology and New World (especially North American) Archaeology. It is similar to the difference between barn painting and fine art. In my opinion there is no comparison between a true science such as southwestern or plains archaeology and the glorified "pot-hunting" of the Old World. I would suggest that you and your readers take a look at the report of the excavation of a plains Indian village in order to see how a real archeaologist works.

Russel L. Brown
#29 Louise Apt.
Ketchikan, Alaska

Dear Editor:

I have been reading s-f mags. for about one year now and used to like *Amazing* and *Fantastic* just as much as a lot of readers who keep writing to you. No offense to the fans but the letter column has been a little too optimistic lately. Probably more than half of these optimistic fans have never seen a pulp-sized magazine, especially an issue of *Amazing* or *Fantastic*.

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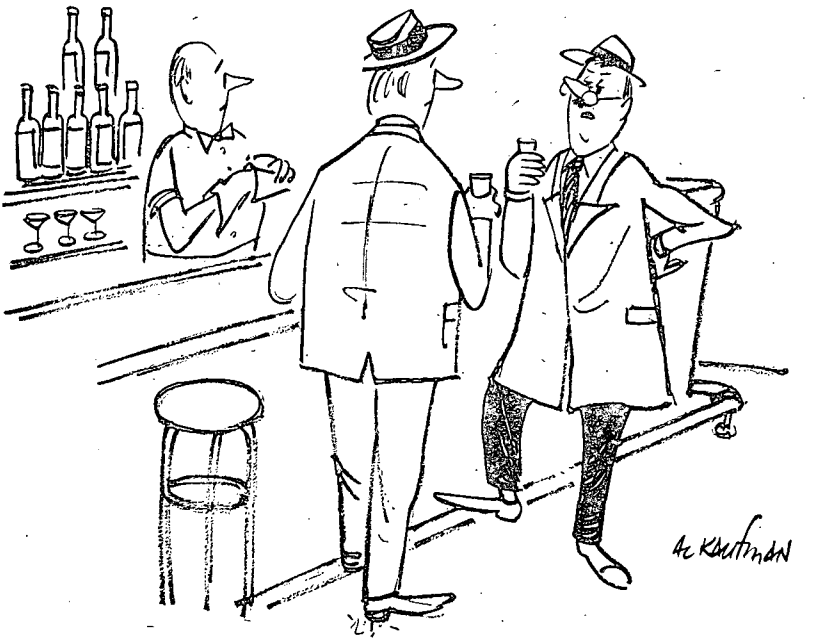
You have had some pretty good stories lately, but so have many other magazines. Recently I read some of the stories you had written for the old issues such as "The Terrible Puppets," "The Girl Who Loved Death," and "The Iron Men of Venus." I thought they were A-1. I have also noticed that you have written some of the lead stories for recent issues and they were about half the size of the aforementioned.

I realize that the digest size has become a trend (unfortunately) but not because the fans prefer it. A very small minority prefer digest to pulp. You run practically no articles now simply because you do not have room. In the October *Amazing* you devoted the whole issue to UFO articles. This was a good idea but it would have taken barely one-third of a pulp magazine. Can you give me one valid reason for going digest size? How about asking the fans what they think about pulp mags?

Danny Pritchett
228 West Bridgeport St.
White Hall, Ill.



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by Isaac Asimov

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